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CODED launches Academy X to empower female students



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Uzbekistan economic reforms spark modern-day gold rush



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Poland beat Wales on 'cruel' penalties to qualify for Euro



Ramadan



Fajr	: 04:23
Shrooq	: 05:43
Dhuhr	: 11:53
Asr	: 15:23
Maghrib	: 18:04
Isha	: 19:21

Amir hails people of determination

Sheikh Mishal visits Disabled Sport Club and Blind Association



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets members of the Kuwait Disabled Sport Club and Kuwait Blind Association on March 26, 2024. — KUNA photos (See Page 3)

RAMADAN KAREEM

Zakat in Islam-I

By Abdeltawab Moustafa

Zakat is a great obligation authorized by Almighty Allah for the purpose of maintaining solidarity among the Muslim community. It is taken from the rich and given to the poor. It is an obligatory expenditure from one's wealth under certain conditions, and it is given to specific groups of people and at a known time. It is one of the pillars of Islam and connected with prayer in many places in the Glorious Quran.

Muslims unanimously agree on its obligation. Among the evidences for that is the Noble Quran, in the chapter titled Al-Baqara (Verse 110) Allah says, "And perform Prayer and give zakat." Additionally, in the two authentic hadith collections, or the sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), on the authority of Ibn Omar (may Allah be pleased with him), he said, "The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said that Islam was built on five pillars, and he mentioned paying zakat among them."

Al-Bukhari reported the story of Muadh's (RA) dispatch to Yemen, at which time Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said, "If they obey you in that, then tell them that Almighty Allah has enjoined upon them a zakat to be taken from their rich and given to their poor."

Recipients of Zakat: The origin in the disbursement of zakat is found in the Holy Quran in the chapter titled Al-Tawba (Verse 60): "Zakat is only for the fuqara (poor) and al-masakin (the needy), and those employed to collect it, and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined towards Islam, and to free captives, and those in debt, and for Allah's cause, and those fighting in God's path, and for the wayfarer (a traveler) — a duty imposed by Allah. And Allah is all-Knowing, all-Wise."

Zakat has a great purpose that becomes evident through contemplation of related texts from the Noble Quran and sunnah (saying, acts and approvals of Prophet Muhammad — PBUH) that order the payment of the obligatory zakat, such as the verses above and other verses and hadiths that urge Muslims to pay zakat and spending in charitable causes in general. (To be continued)

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, accompanied by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, visited the Kuwait Disabled Sport Club on Tuesday evening on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. HH the Amir was welcomed by Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Minister of State for Communication Affairs Dawood Marafi, Director-General of Public Authority for Sport Youssef Abdullah Al-Baidan and the Club's Chairman Shafi Mohammad Al-Hajri.

HH the Amir addressed the gathering by saying

Army chief hails Amir's directives as 'roadmap'

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Army Chief Lt Gen Bandar Al-Muzain on Tuesday called on army commanders to act according to the instructions of HH the Amir and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, being a "roadmap and approach". The top general made the remark while addressing a meeting of the Military Defense Council, the ministry of defense said in a press release.

He pointed out that Deputy Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Acting Interior Minister Sheikh Fahad Al-Youssef Al-Sabah's keenness to see all army commanders act in line with the political leadership's directives. "These directives act as a roadmap and approach, aiming at en-

he was pleased to visit the club to congratulate its members, their families and officials on the holy month of Ramadan. He said Kuwait, with all sectors concerned, has been paying much attention to the disabled as being a main component of the Kuwaiti social fabric, providing them with much care and support. He thanked the club's administration and everyone concerned for their care of the members, citing championships in several international events, particularly winning 24 medals at the Sharjah International Para Athletics Forum and the 15th Fazza In-

ternational Athletics Championship in the UAE.

HH the Amir also thanked the families of the champions and the disabled champions, who had proved their strong resolve and will to address challenges, urging them to keep on attaining goals and maintaining their levels. HH the Amir called on those in charge of the affairs of the disabled to adopt all-out policies to support, empower and incorporate them in society by providing them with health, housing and educational care and enacting appropriate legislation to protect them.

Continued on Page 6



KUWAIT: Chief of the General Staff Lt Gen Bandar Al-Muzain chairs a meeting of the Military Defense Council on March 26, 2024. — KUNA

couraging army personnel and upgrading their preparedness, efficiency and capabilities to cope with advancement

in qualification, training and armament, and to enable them to serve and protect their nation," he added. — KUNA

Zionists pound Gaza, target main hospitals

GAZA: Zionist forces pounded besieged Gaza on Wednesday in the war sparked by the Oct 7 attack and fought Hamas around several hospitals despite a UN Security Council demand for a ceasefire. Talks in Qatar towards a truce and hostage release deal, involving US and Egyptian mediators, have brought no result so far, with the Zionist entity and the Palestinian group blaming each other.

Tensions have risen between the Zionist entity and its top ally the United States over the soaring civilian death toll and dire food shortages in Gaza, and Zionist plans to push its ground offensive into the far-southern city of Rafah, which is packed with displaced civilians. In heavy



GAZA: A fireball erupts during Zionist bombardment on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on March 26, 2024. — AFP

overnight bombardment, Zionist strikes again hit Gaza City and Rafah, where a fireball lit up the sky over the city crowded with up to 1.5 million people, most of them displaced by the war.

The health ministry in Gaza said 66 people were killed in overnight bombardment and combat. Zionist forces have battled militants in

and around three Gaza hospitals, raising fears for patients, medical staff and displaced people inside them. Fighting has raged for nine days around Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital, the territory's largest, and more recently near two hospitals in the main southern city of Khan Yunis, Al-Amal and Nasser.

Continued on Page 6

Nations rally behind expert who accused Zionists of genocide

GENEVA: The UN expert who concluded the Zionist entity was committing acts of genocide in the Gaza Strip received broad support at the United Nations on Tuesday, with countries speaking up to back her and her report. Francesca Albanese, the special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, told the UN Human Rights Council that countries should impose an arms embargo and sanctions on the Zionist entity.

Expanding in person on her report released on Monday, Albanese said the Zionist entity was characterizing the entire Gazan population as "targetable, killable and destroyable", and had ostentatiously

Continued on Page 6



Francesca Albanese





KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received Wednesday the Chairman and members of the Board of Trustees of the National Committee for Supporting Education and the Endowment for Supporting Education.— KUNA photos



CODED launches Academy X to empower female students

Kuwait Times and Kuwait News sponsor initiative, Zain a key strategic partner



Top executives and media personnel take a group photo. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



The media conference after signing the partnership agreement with CODED.

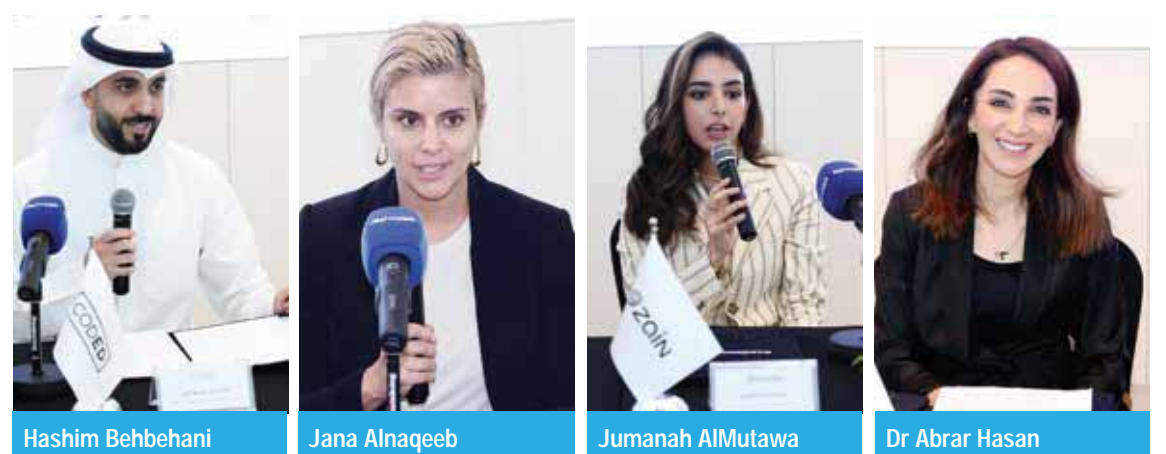
By Ghadeer Ghloom

KUWAIT: Kuwait Times and Kuwait News are sponsoring Academy X, an initiative by CODED Academy aimed at harnessing the potential of female students for a future in technology and artificial intelligence, with Zain a key strategic partner in this endeavor. A media conference took place on Tuesday at the Culture Center at Kuwait University to announce the launch of Academy X.

During the media conference, CEO of CODED Academy Hashim Behbehani welcomed the audience and announced the launch of the first iteration of Academy X initiative in 2024. The primary goal of this initiative is to empower young girls aged between 14 and 18 by providing them with essential skills needed to excel in the technology sector. This initiative is specifically aimed at providing equal opportunities for girls and boys. He also said the objective for 2024 is to reach 300 female students, teaching them the latest technology and artificial intelligence tools to help them build their future, whether by starting their own businesses or excelling in their careers.

Behbehani further elaborated that this initiative is for free due to the support from strategic partners such as Zain, as well as media sponsors such as Kuwait Times and Kuwait News, which brought success to this initiative and its message delivery to the people. PR and CSR Manager at Kuwait Times and Kuwait News Jana Alnaqeeb emphasized the commitment of Kuwait Times and Kuwait News to their media responsibilities and confirmed to follow the students' journey and showcase their projects to the public.

Jumanah AlMutawa, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Manager at Zain, expressed gratitude towards CODED for sharing its vision with Zain, highlighting Zain's dedication to offering equal opportunities for both male and female students. She also emphasized the importance of initiatives like Academy X, as she cited a study that predicts significant changes in the job market due to advancements in technology. She concluded by shedding light on Zain's commitment to supporting initiatives that empower women and social development. As for this initiative, Zain will keep in touch with mentoring and supporting the students' progress.



Associate Professor at the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University Dr Abrar Hasan expressed her satisfaction with Kuwait University's strategic partnership with CODED, emphasizing the importance of empowering the new generation, particularly women, in the field of science. She highlighted that Academy X plays a

central role in this partnership by equipping students with necessary tools to excel in technology and artificial intelligence projects. "By encouraging girls towards this field, CODED is investing in a brighter future that benefits everyone, going beyond limitations, thus, creating opportunities for all," she explained.

Deputy FM meets Spanish envoy



KUWAIT: Kuwait Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received Wednesday the Spanish Ambassador to the country, Miguel Jose Moro Aguilar. The bilateral ties between the two countries were touched on during the talks. — KUNA

Info minister meets Indian envoy



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture Abdulrahman Baddah Al-Mutairi received on Wednesday Indian Ambassador Dr Adarsh Swaika. They discussed ways of further strengthening cooperation between Kuwait and India in the fields of media, information and culture.

Zain supports Al Kharafi Special Needs Center

KUWAIT: Zain continues to support the annual Girgian celebration (traditional candy distribution) organized by Al Kharafi Center for Special Needs Activities. The event featured fun and interactive programs that brought joy to children with special needs and their families and was attended by the center's Director Aisha Al Salem.

This step came under the Zain Alshuhoor campaign, through which the company reaches out to the entire community with a plethora of initiatives and contributions that last throughout the Holy Month of Ramadan. Zain's support to the event also comes as part of its extended strategic partnership with Al Kharafi Center for Special Needs Activities, where the company supports its events during special seasons and occasions.

The joyful event featured many entertaining segments, like on-stage traditional acts performed by the center's children, engaging competitions and interactive programs designed to nurture their creative talents, and more. At the end of the event, Zain's team joined in giving out Girgian candy to the children and their families, bringing joy to everyone.

Zain Alshuhoor is one of Kuwait's biggest and most successful community programs during the Holy Month. The campaign features a wide range of humanitarian, charitable, social, religious, health, and sports programs that continue throughout Ramadan. Every year, the company introduces a bigger, renewed version of the campaign that expands upon the previous year's initiatives and programs. Al Kharafi Center for Special Needs Activities aims to offer a specialized, safe, engaging, and entertaining environment for all children with special needs. The center offers children and their families a wide range of services, including rehabilitation, entertainment, training, awareness, and more.



Aisha Al Salem honors Zain's team.



Children and families celebrate Girgian.

Local

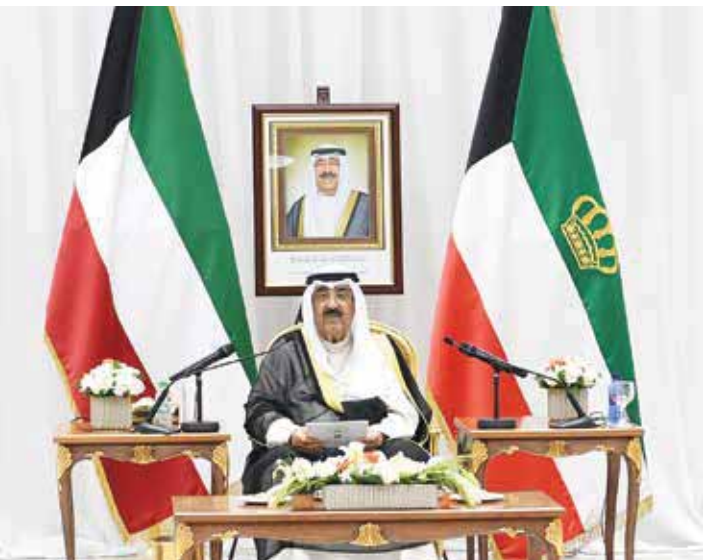
Blind Association welcomes Amir

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, visited Kuwait Blind Association on Tuesday marking the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. Upon arrival, His Highness the Amir was received by Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Children Affairs Sheikh Feras Saud Al-Sabah, Board Manager of the Association Fayiz Al-Azmi, and the Association's Secretary Mansour Al-Enezi. Afterwards, His Highness the Amir delivered a speech on the occasion where he expressed his best wishes on the holy month of Ramadan and asked Allah Almighty for His blessings on all Arab and Islamic nations. — KUNA



Amir visits Disabled Sport Club

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, accompanied by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, visited the Kuwait Disabled Sport Club on Tuesday evening on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. His Highness the Amir was welcomed by Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Minister of State for Communication Affairs Dawood Maarafi, Director General of the Public Sports Authority Yousef Abdullah Al-Baidan and the Club's Board Chairman Shafi Mohammad Al-Hajri. His Highness the Amir addressed the gathering by saying that he was pleased to visit the club to congratulate its disabled members, their families, and officials on the holy month of Ramadan. — KUNA



Local

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Benefits of fasting



Promotes a healthy heart

Fasting lowers the bad cholesterol, regulates blood volume, and normalizes blood pressure. Research on animals has proved to make the heart muscle more efficient and accelerate the growth of blood vessels in the heart. While there are so many benefits of fasting, it must be approached with caution. People with diabetes, high blood pressure, pregnant and breastfeeding mothers should not fast.

Boosts brain function

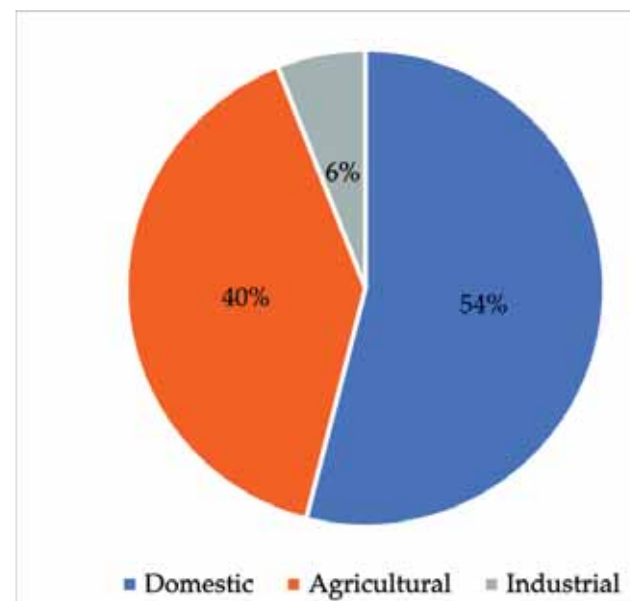
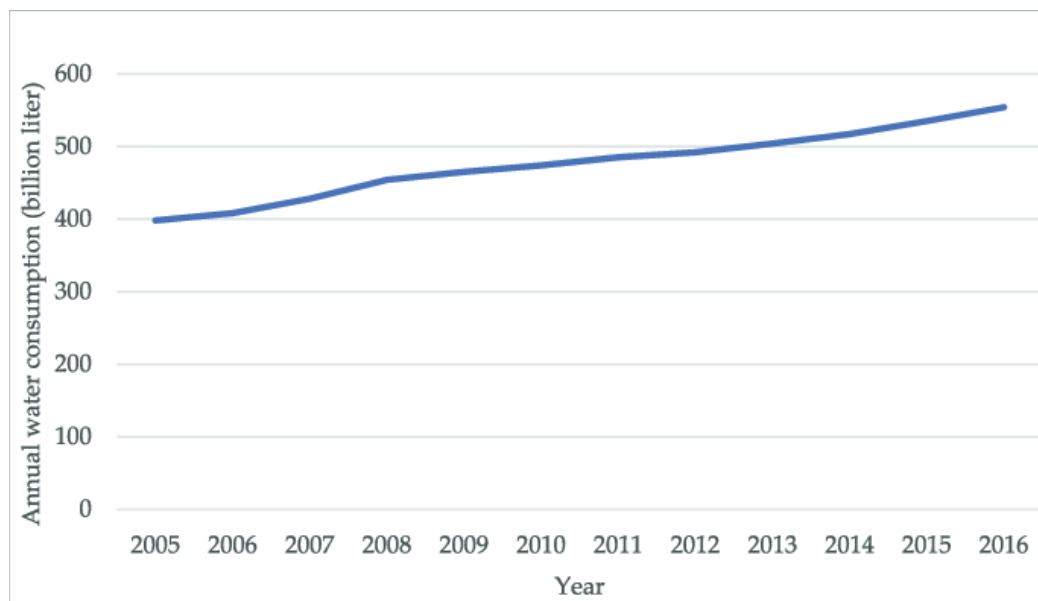
Fasting is known to improve brain function by boosting the production of a protein called brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF). A number of other chemicals that enhance neural health are triggered by BDNF, which activates brain stem cells to form new neurons. Besides protecting your brain cells, this protein also helps prevent Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

Gives a clear skin

Fasting can help clear the skin because with digestion temporarily halted, the body can concentrate its regenerative powers on other systems. Having no food for only one day has been shown to improve the body's ability to detoxify toxins and keep liver, kidneys and other organs functioning properly.

Water conservation
a matter of necessity

Kuwait seeks to boost water security, build capacities



By Khaled Al-Abdulhadi

KUWAIT: Kuwait is located in an arid region with hot desert climate, with one of the least water resource access regions around the world. With the advent of water desalination projects, Kuwait now has one of the most available water resources per capita in the world, but it is also among the highest water consumers per capita in the world.

On March 22, Minister of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Dr Salem Al-Hajraf stressed the need to enhance water security and build capacities to face common global challenges on the occasion of World Water Day. "Water is not just a private resource that can be monopolized and compete for its sources, but it is a human right that everyone must respect," he said.

Hajraf said the celebration of World Water Day sends a message to world leaders and people of the world that it is necessary to cooperate in the field of water to achieve a positive multiplier effect for humanity, as water is the main pillar of life. "Kuwait's participation in celebrating this day shows its keenness to secure its local water needs in modern and innovative ways dating back to 1951, when it established in Shuwaikh the first seawater desalination plant in the world

at the time," he added.

He pointed out that World Water Day is an opportunity to join efforts on water issues and accelerate the pace of progress in this vital field. "We must all play our role, each from his position, to preserve this essential resource of existence and work together to manage it in a sound and sustainable manner."

Hajraf explained that the ministry of electricity, water and renewable energy has been working since its establishment on Nov 17, 1962 to achieve its goals to be a tangible reality that keeps pace with Kuwait's vision in the growth and development of the state's housing and service projects.

Water demand is expected to rise to 800 million imperial gallons per day by 2035, while the maximum demand for water by the end of this year could reach 585 million imperial gallons per day, an increase of 27 percent, he said. The ministry plans to develop its future plan to meet the needs of the state, pointing out that its production of water will reach nearly one billion imperial gallons per day by 2035. Regardless, people should also be more aware of their water usage.

Hajraf pointed out that the world committed in 2015 to the sixth goal of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which stipulates that sustainable water management for all by 2030 and providing safe drink-

ing water to disadvantaged communities. He stated the challenges facing the state in the water security sector still exist, foremost of which is the high consumption rate. "The ministry has taken serious and effective steps towards improving water management and conservation through studying and experimenting with the use of renewable energy. We aim to utilize modern and advanced technologies with high efficiency and high performance in the treatment, transportation and storage of water," he added.

The aim of World Water day is to take action to deal with the global water crisis in support of achieving the sixth Sustainable Development Goal. The ministry in 2016 stressed the importance of developing and preserving Arab water resources during the meetings of the eighth session of the Arab Ministerial Council, which discussed 23 items on water problems in the Arab world, most notably the purification and preservation of water sources in addition to treated water.

In 2021, the total consumption of freshwater in Kuwait amounted to around 709 million cubic meters per day. This indicated an increase from around 696 million cubic meters of freshwater consumed during the previous year, and 603 million cubic meters in 2012. Over a 10-year period, water consumption has risen around sixfold.

Jawaher Tent returns
to Four Seasons Hotel

KUWAIT: The much-anticipated Jawaher Tent makes its return at the Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait for the holy month of Ramadan. This year, the hotel hosted its media partners and influencers on 18 March 2024 to revel in the Ramadan spirit. Over 130 guests were treated to an extraordinary Ghabga experience that seamlessly blended traditional values with the hotel's commitment to excellence, recognized by consecutive Forbes five-star ratings.

The Jawaher Tent, popular over the years for its elegant setting and cozy atmosphere, stands as a testament to the hotel's luxury and service excellence. This year boasts the largest variety of food and dessert buffets yet, featuring an array of culinary delights that cater to every taste. From traditional dishes that pay homage to Kuwaiti culture to international cuisines prepared with flair by Executive Chef Thierry Papillier and his team of culinary artists, every bite promises to be an unforgettable experience.

The tent's décor, inspired by Arabian elegance and the joyful spirit of Ramadan, offers the perfect backdrop for gatherings and social celebrations. Beyond the lavish spread and inviting décor, the Media Partners and Influencers event ambience was further elevated with the addition of a signature scent that was crafted specifically for the Ghabga by master perfumer, Hassan Al Sarraf, who captivated guests by taking them through his process of crafting the special perfume for the occasion.

Additionally, the tent also featured live henna and face art stations, allowing guests to truly get into the festive spirit. To complete the ambience, live Ramadan music filled the air, creating an enchanting atmosphere that beautifully melded tradition with celebration. "We are honored to once again open the doors of our beloved Jawaher Tent for Ramadan," said Martin Kipping, General Manager at Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya. "Our dedication to excellence,



celebrated through consecutive Forbes five-star accolades, underpins every aspect of our hospitality. This tradition is a beautiful showcase of the rich heritage of Ramadan fused with the innovative spirit of our hotel. We look forward to celebrating this unifying time with our valued media partners and other key influencers, offering an unparalleled culinary journey and creating lasting memories together."

The Jawaher Tent at Four Seasons Hotel

Kuwait at Burj Alshaya not only symbolizes the hotel's pursuit of culinary and service excellence but also its commitment to fostering a sense of community and togetherness during the holy month. As the hotel celebrates this special time, the tent invites guests to create new memories, strengthen bonds, and enjoy the hospitality that Four Seasons is renowned for, making it the perfect setting for an unforgettable Ramadan experience.



Turkish Ambassador Tuba Nur Sonmez, Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Ambassador Samih Hayat pose for a group photo with other ambassadors after the event.

Turkey 'renowned for its vibrant Ramadan traditions': Envoy

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Turkish Embassy in Kuwait held a ghabga on Tuesday to transcend borders and cultures and celebrate the spirit of unity, compassion and reflection. "Turkey is renowned for its vibrant Ramadan traditions, festive decorations and lively celebrations. During Ramadan, Turkish cities come alive with colorful lights adorning the streets and bustling markets where shoppers purchase special foods and treats for the evening meal," Turkish Ambassador Tuba Nur Sonmez said.

She noted that being away from home during this sacred month can evoke feelings of homesickness, but fortunately, she finds solace in Kuwait, a place rich in traditions that "make me feel at home". "Here, we partake in ghabga and diwanis, distribute sweets to children dressed in traditional attire for Gergian, and savor traditional Kuwaiti dishes during



Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Tuba Nur Sonmez

iftar and suhoor. Yet beyond the colorful customs lies the true essence of Ramadan. It is more than just a month — it is a time of self-discovery, empathy and renewal," Sonmez said.

The ambassador concluded with the Ramadan message of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, quoting: "Let us make the most of the merciful atmosphere of Ramadan by praying to Almighty Allah to bring an end to the suffering, systematic atrocities, torture and oppression in various parts of the world, especially in Palestine."

South Korean Embassy
hosts media personnel

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The South Korean Embassy hosted on Tuesday an iftar gathering for local media professionals at the embassy. South Korean Ambassador Chung Byung-ha praised the Kuwaiti media for their diligence in accurately portraying Korea through their reporting, expressing his interest in exploring the traditions of Ramadan and the cultural practices of Kuwait to deepen his understanding of its people.

He praised the distinguished bilateral relations between the two countries, expressing his country's aspiration to develop and strengthen various aspects of cooperation with Kuwait. The ambassador stressed the depth, strength and durability of Korean-Kuwaiti relations, which he described as historic and advanced at all levels and various areas of cooperation, pointing to the expansion of areas of bilateral cooperation to include new sectors such as airport



South Korea's Ambassador Chung Byung-ha gives speech during the event.

management, smart farms, smart cities, health, medicine and renewable energy.

From a cultural perspective, Chung acknowledged the significant impact of Korean entertainment on Kuwaiti society, showcasing the universal appeal of Korean dramas and the role they play in connecting people.

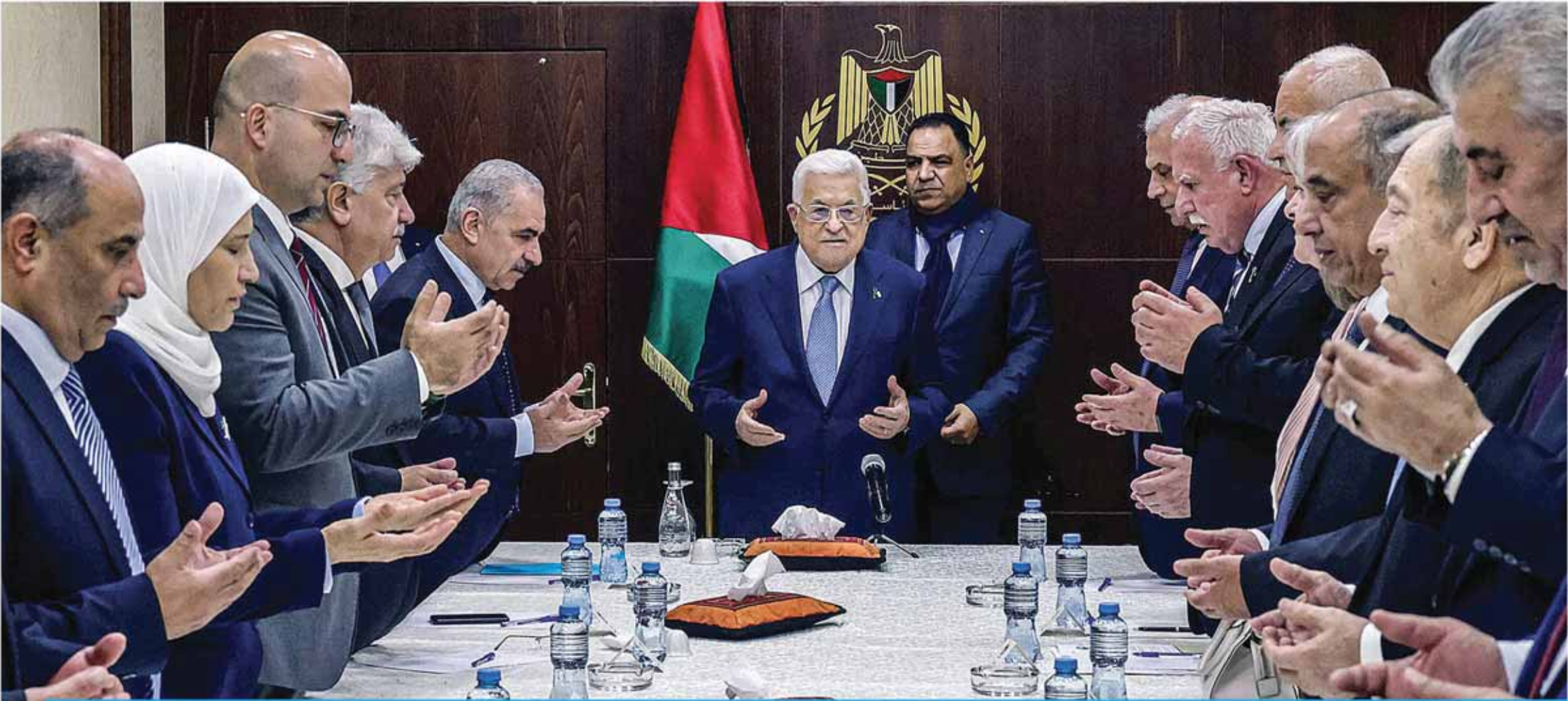


South Korea's Ambassador Chung Byung-ha poses for a group photo with local media.



Trump hit with gag order in NY hush money case

6 presumed dead in bridge collapse



RAMALLAH: A handout picture provided by the Palestinian Authority shows Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas (center) reciting a prayer before meeting with cabinet members of his caretaker Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh. — AFP photos

Palestinian Authority reforms far off

Observers say no substantial changes on the table; government ‘suffocated’ by Zionist entity

RAMALLAH: Nineteen years after assuming the presidency, Mahmud Abbas has timidly begun reforming the Palestinian Authority under US pressure, though diplomats were unconvinced a revamped administration was ready for a post-Gaza war future.

Abbas, 88, is dogged by low popularity among Palestinians and the Zionist decades-old occupation of the West Bank where his government is based. In January, just over three months into the Zionist war on Gaza, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Abbas in Ramallah and urged “administrative reforms” to benefit Palestinians and potentially reunite the West Bank and Gaza under a single rule.

The Palestinian president has moved to fill vacant governor positions and on March 15 appointed economist and long-trusted adviser Mohammed Mustafa as prime minister. It is “a start, but it won’t be enough”, said Hasan Khreisheh, deputy speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, the PA’s parliament which has not met since 2007. Abbas is expected to name a full government by early April, and Khreisheh said the White House is expecting a cabinet “as soon as possible”. “The Americans want more important measures so they can say there has been renewal,” he said.

The assault on the Gaza Strip, which is governed by Hamas, has piled pressure

on the Palestinian Authority. The PA has long been stained by divisions, corruption scandals and authoritarian tendencies, and Abbas’s recent measures have so far done little to reassure diplomats eager to find an able and reliable Palestinian partner when the war ends.

‘Doesn’t change much’

Abbas, elected in 2005, is formally president in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, though the besieged territory is run by longtime rivals Hamas. Arab and Western powers want to see a reformed PA that could one day be in charge of an independent state in the both West Bank and Gaza.

The first move by Abbas was the appointment of regional governors in the West Bank whose seats had been unoccupied since August, followed by naming Mustafa to lead a new government. But Western diplomats told AFP they were not convinced any substantial reforms were on the table. “It doesn’t change much,” said one of them on condition of anonymity. “We’re waiting to see what comes next”.

Mustafa, 69, is not a member of Abbas’s Fatah party, but pundits view it as little proof of a political revamp, noting his rich past as financial adviser to the president, deputy premier and economy minister in Fatah-led governments.

One diplomat said Mustafa’s experi-

ence at the World Bank meant he knows “all international donors”, which may come in handy for the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority — particularly if it takes on the colossal task of rebuilding war-battered Gaza.

‘Suffocation’

For his first public appearance after his nomination, Mustafa talked of “transparency” and “zero tolerance” for corruption. But Palestinian commentators say Abbas must still prove his determination to avoid authoritarianism.

He has remained in power without elections since his term expired in 2009, and in 2018 dissolved parliament, which by law is meant to approve the government. Political divisions that have long plagued Palestinian politics remain a major hurdle.

Neither Abbas nor Mustafa have spoken publicly about the role Hamas could play in government, and the new prime minister has made no mention of intra-Palestinian reconciliation which his predecessor Mohammed Shtayyeh had painted as an “urgent need”.

Either way, some observers worry about the actual impact any institutional reforms can have in an environment heavily constrained by the Zionist entity. “For the next government to be able to make a difference, it would have to be able to breathe financially and political-



This photo taken from the Gaza-Zionist border shows smoke billowing following a Zionist strike in the besieged Palestinian territory on March 27, 2024.

ly,” said Ghassan Khatib, a former Palestinian minister and a professor at Birzeit University near Ramallah.

The Zionist entity has occupied the West Bank since 1967, when it also seized the Gaza Strip. Despite withdrawing from the coastal territory in 2005, it has maintained control over its borders and imposed a crippling blockade when Hamas seized power.

Khatib denounced what he called the

Zionist entity’s “suffocation” of the PA by withholding tax revenues and obstructing elections. “If you want to reform, you need elections, and (the Zionist entity) must allow Palestinians to hold them,” Khatib said.

Abbas called off the last planned elections, in 2021, citing the Zionist entity’s refusal to allow voting in annexed east Jerusalem. Polls at the time predicted a Hamas victory. — AFP

Kate’s ordeal sheds light on under-50s cancer mystery

PARIS: When Catherine, Princess of Wales, revealed she was being treated for cancer last week, part of the shock was that an otherwise healthy 42-year-old has a disease that mostly plagues older people. However, researchers have been increasingly sounding the alarm that more and more people under 50 are getting cancer — and no one knows why.

Across the world, the rate of under-50s diagnosed with 29 common cancers surged by nearly 80 percent between 1990 and 2019, a large study in BMJ Oncology found last year. The researchers predicted the number of new cancer cases among younger adults will rise another 30 percent by the end of this decade, with wealthy countries particularly affected.

The increase in cases — and soaring global population — means that the number of deaths among under 50s from cancer has risen by nearly 28 percent over the last 30 years. This occurred even as the odds of people of all ages surviving cancer have roughly doubled over the last half century.

Shivan Sivakumar, a cancer researcher at the UK’s University of Birmingham, called it an “epidemic” of young adult cancer. Since Kate Middleton revealed on Friday that her cancer was discovered after she received abdominal surgery earlier this year, Sivakumar and other doctors have spoken out about the uptick in younger cancer patients they have been seeing at their clinics.

While breast cancer remains the most common for people under 50, the researchers expressed particular concern about the rise of gastrointestinal cancers—such as of the colon, pancreas, liver and esophagus — in younger adults.

Colon cancer is now the leading cause of cancer deaths in men under 50 in the United States,

according to the American Cancer Society. For women, it is number two—behind only breast cancer. One high profile case of colorectal cancer was “Black Panther” actor Chadwick Boseman, who died at the age of 43 in 2020.

Why is this happening?

“We just don’t have the evidence yet” to say exactly what is causing this rise, Sivakumar told AFP, adding it was likely a combination of factors. Helen Coleman, a cancer epidemiology professor at Queen’s University Belfast who has studied early onset cancer in Northern Ireland, told AFP there were two potential explanations.

One is that people in their 40s were exposed to factors known to cause cancer — such tobacco smoke, alcohol or being obese — at an earlier age than previous generations. She pointed out that the “obesity epidemic” did not start until the 1980s.

Sivakumar felt that at least part of the puzzle could be explained by obesity. However, there is “another wave” of under-50 patients who are neither obese nor genetically predisposed still getting cancer, he emphasized, adding that this could not be put down to “statistical chance”.

The other theory, Coleman said, is that “something different” has been going on with her generation. Fingers have been pointed out a range of possible culprits — including chemicals, new drugs and microplastics — but none have been proven.

Some have suggested that so-called ultra-processed foods could be to blame. “But there’s very little data to back any of that up,” Coleman said. Another theory is that the food we eat could be changing our gut microbiome. While there is nothing conclusive yet, Coleman said her own research suggested that cancer causes changes to the microbiome, not the other way around.

Anti-vaxx conspiracy theorists have even tried to blame COVID-19 vaccines. This is easily disproven, because the rise in young adult cancer has taken place over decades, but the vaccines have only been around for a few years. — AFP

Households waste ‘staggering’ one billion meals a day

PARIS: Households around the world threw away one billion meals every single day in 2022 in what the United Nations on Wednesday called a “global tragedy” of food waste. More than \$1 trillion worth of food was binned by households and businesses at a time when nearly 800 million people were going hungry, the UN’s latest Food Waste Index Report says.

It said that more than 1 billion tons of food — almost one fifth of all the produce available on the market — was wasted in 2022, most of it by households. “Food waste is a global tragedy. Millions will go hungry today as food is wasted across the world,” Inger Andersen, executive director of the UN Environment Program, said in a statement.

Such wastage was not just a moral but “environmental failure”, the report said. Food waste produces five times the planet-heating emissions of the aviation sector, and requires huge tracts of land be converted for growing crops that are never eaten.

The report, co-authored with non-profit organization WRAP, is just the second on global food waste compiled by the UN and provides the most complete picture to date. As data collection has improved the true scale of the problem has become much clearer, said Clementine O’Connor from UNEP. “The more food waste you look for, the more that you find,” she told AFP.

Billion meals binned

The report said that the “billion meals” figure was a “very conservative estimate” and “the real amount could be much higher”. “For me, it’s just staggering,” Richard Swannell from WRAP told AFP. “You could actually feed all the people that are currently hungry in the world — about 800 million people — over a meal a day just from the food that is wasted every single year.”

He said bringing together producers and retailers had helped reduce waste and get food to those who need it, and

more such action was needed. Food services like restaurants, canteens and hotels were responsible for 28 percent of all wasted food in 2022, while retail like butchers and greengrocers dumped 12 percent.

But the biggest culprits were households, which accounted for 60 percent — some 631 million tons. Swannell said much of this occurred because people were simply buying more food than they needed, but also misjudging portion sizes and not eating leftovers. Another issue was expiration dates, he said, with perfectly good produce being trashed because people incorrectly assumed their food had gone off.

A lot of food, particularly in the developing world, was not so frivolously wasted, but instead lost in transportation or spoiling because of a lack of refrigeration, the report said. Contrary to popular belief, food waste is not just a “rich country” problem and can be observed across the world, the report said. Hotter countries, too, generated more waste, possibly due to higher consumption of fresh foods with substantial inedible parts.

‘Devastating effects’

Businesses also underestimate the cost of wasting food to their bottom line because it was cheap to dump unused produce in landfill. “It’s quicker and easier to throw it away at the moment because the waste fee is either zero or very low,” O’Connor said. Food waste had “devastating effects” on people and the planet, the report said.

Converting natural ecosystems for agriculture is a leading cause of habitat loss yet food waste takes up the equivalent of nearly 30 percent of the world’s farming land, the report said. “If we can reduce food waste across the entire of the supply chain, we can ... minimize the need to have land set aside that’s growing stuff that’s never used,” Swannell said.

It is also a key driver of climate change, generating up to 10 percent of annual greenhouse gas emissions. “If food waste was a country, it would be the third biggest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions on the planet behind the US and China,” Swannell said. But people rarely think about it, he said, despite the opportunity to “reduce our carbon footprint, reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, and save money, simply by making better use of the food that we’re already buying”. — AFP

International

6 presumed dead in bridge collapse

Authorities to focus efforts on recovery of missing people, help families 'get closure'

BALTIMORE: Authorities in Baltimore were set to focus on expanding recovery efforts Wednesday after a cargo ship slammed into a major bridge, causing it to collapse and leaving six people presumed dead.

All six were members of a construction crew repairing potholes on the Francis Scott Key Bridge in the US East Coast city when the structure was sent careening into the Patapsco River at around 1:30 am (0530 GMT).

A desperate search in near-freezing conditions managed to pull two people from the choppy waters, but after nearly 16 hours, officials said they had given up hope of rescuing the others. "At this point we do not believe that we're going to find any of these individuals still alive," US Coast Guard Rear Admiral Shannon Gilreath told reporters as night fell on Tuesday.

He added that responders were transitioning "to a different phase." Speaking at the same press conference, Maryland Secretary of State Police Roland Butler said the focus would shift to a "recovery operation" by Wednesday morning. "We're hoping to put divers in the water and begin a more detailed search to do our very best to recover those six missing people," he said.

After the search effort was called off, Mayor Brandon Scott emphasized the need to help families of the victims "get the closure they deserve." "My heart is with those families tonight and in the days ahead," he said in a statement.

One of the missing workers was father-of-three Miguel Luna, according to Casa, a nonprofit that serves immigrant communities. Luna, from El Salvador, had left for work at 6:30 pm on Monday and never returned, Casa said.

His wife, Maria del Carmen Castellon, told Telemundo 44 that she was "devastated" by the wait for any information. Two of the other missing workers were from Guatemala, the country's foreign ministry

said, while local news outlet The Baltimore Banner reported that Mexican and Honduran nationals were also among the victims.

"My heart hurts with this situation," said Jesus Campos, a construction company employee who said he worked alongside the missing. "They're human beings and they are my colleagues."

Attempt to drop anchors

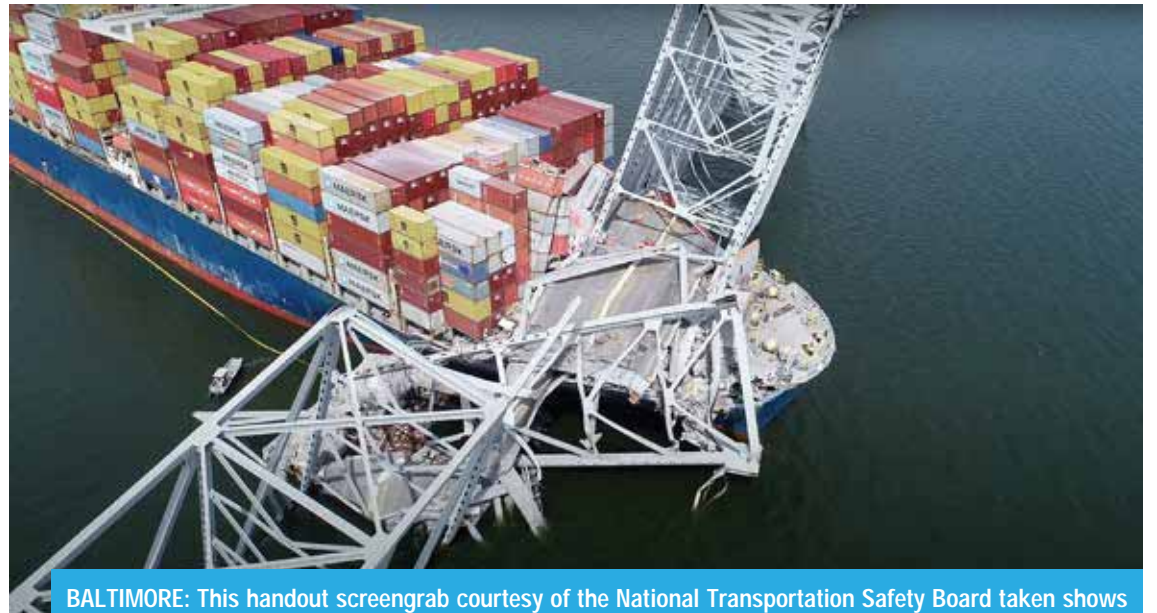
Footage of the collision showed packed container ship the Dali slamming into one of the bridge's supports, causing the 47-year-old structure to collapse into one of the busiest US commercial harbors. Officials stressed that there was no known connection to terrorism, and that the preliminary investigation indicated an accident.

Details emerged on how the crew tried to avert disaster after their 985-foot ship lost power and began careening toward the bridge. "Just prior to the incident, the vessel, Dali, had experienced momentary loss of propulsion. As a result, it was unable to maintain the desired heading," said the maritime authority for Singapore, where the Dali is flagged.

The authority said the ship's management company, Synergy Marine Pte Ltd, reported the crew "dropped anchors" in a last-ditch attempt to hold it back. The ship had passed two overseas inspections in 2023, the authority said Wednesday, adding that a fault monitor gauge was fixed in June.

Investigators from the authority and Singapore's Transport Safety Investigation Bureau were headed to Baltimore on Tuesday to assist the US Coast Guard. US federal investigators expect recordings from the vessel to be critical to determine what happened, said Jennifer Homendy, head of the National Transportation Safety Board, which is overseeing the investigation.

"Certainly investigations are a priority, certainly



BALTIMORE: This handout screengrab courtesy of the National Transportation Safety Board taken shows part of the steel frame of the bridge sitting on top of the container ship. — AFP

environmental considerations are a priority, and so is traffic and getting cargo vessels in and out of the port of Baltimore," she said. "But right now it's about people, it's about families and addressing the needs of those impacted."

Ninth-busiest US port

The Francis Scott Key Bridge, named after the poet who penned the lyrics to the US national anthem, is an important link in the East Coast highway system, used by about 34,000 vehicles every day.

The Port of Baltimore is the ninth-busiest major US port in terms of both foreign cargo handled and for-

eign cargo value, and is directly responsible for more than 15,000 jobs, supporting almost 140,000 more.

US President Joe Biden called the collapse a "terrible accident," and pledged to get the port reopened and the bridge rebuilt. There are other bridges and tunnels for drivers to cross the harbor. However, the tangled steel barrier now lying half-submerged across the harbor entrance blocks almost all maritime traffic.

"There is no question that this will be a major and protracted impact to supply chains," US Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg warned, adding it was "too soon" to know when the port might reopen. — AFP

Local anger forces relocation of rescued Rohingya in Indonesia

JAKARTA: Dozens of Rohingya refugees saved after their boat capsized off Indonesia's westernmost coast last week have been forced from their temporary shelter due to local protests, a United Nations refugee agency official said Wednesday.

The mostly Muslim ethnic Rohingya are heavily persecuted in Myanmar, and thousands risk their lives each year on long and expensive sea journeys to try to reach Malaysia or Indonesia. But the influx of refugees has sparked anger in Indonesia's Aceh province, where some locals have pushed boats carrying Rohingya back into the sea or tried to storm their temporary shelters in recent months.

The survivors of last week's capsizing were taken a 10-minute drive away to the local government chief's office in West Aceh, UNHCR protection associate Faisal Rahman told AFP. "They are moved to the backyard of the bupati (local regent) office," he said.

Authorities last Thursday rescued 69 Rohingya refugees found after clinging to the hull of their overturned vessel for more than a day. Six others were rescued by fishermen a day earlier. At least 11 Rohingya were found dead at sea after rescuers called off the search Friday, despite some survivors saying more than 150 people had been aboard the boat when it capsized.

The survivors were given shelter in an old Red Cross building in West Aceh regency, but dozens of locals stormed the facility on Tuesday to demand their eviction, forcing authorities to move the group of 75 refugees.

Indonesia Foreign Ministry spokesman Lalu Muha-



MEULABOH: Newly arrived Rohingya refugees rest at the shelter initially allocated for them in Meulaboh, West Aceh, on March 23, 2024. — AFP

mad Iqbal told AFP Wednesday that Jakarta gave the Rohingya temporary shelter for humanitarian reasons but the UN and nations signed to the UN Refugee Convention were obliged "to give permanent shelter".

Indonesia is not a signatory to the convention. From mid-November to late January, 1,752 Rohingya refugees landed on Indonesian shores, according to the UNHCR, which said it was the biggest influx since 2015.

Some Aceh locals have protested against those

who reached land. In December, hundreds of students forced the relocation of more than a hundred Rohingya refugees, storming a function hall where they were sheltering and kicking their belongings.

In another incident, a police line stopped locals from storming a Rohingya shelter on Aceh's Sabang island. Many Acehnese are sympathetic to the plight of their fellow Muslims. But others say their patience has been tested, accusing Rohingya of anti-social behavior. — AFP

Iran frees 18 Filipino crew of seized oil tanker

MANILA: The Philippines said Wednesday that Iran has freed all 18 Filipino crew members of an oil tanker that was seized in the Gulf of Oman in January. Iran's navy had boarded the Greek-owned St Nikolas, which was carrying 19 crew, off the coast of Oman. The only Greek crew member was released the following week.

Tehran began freeing the Filipino crew in batches at the end of January after a replacement crew was hired from Russia and other countries, Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Eduardo de Vega told AFP. "They were not hostages ... but they were not allowed to leave without replacements," de Vega said of the Filipino crew.

The last of the Filipino crew returned to Manila last week, he added. The Marshall Islands-flagged ship was carrying 145,000 tons of oil from Iraq and heading to Turkey when it was seized. It has been anchored in the vicinity of the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas.

Iran's state media has said the seizure was in retaliation to the "theft" of Iranian oil by the United States from the same tanker, at the time named the Suez Rajan.

Tehran has responded with tit-for-tat measures in the past after seizures of Iranian oil shipments. Crippling US sanctions, reimposed following Washington's 2018 withdrawal from a landmark nuclear deal, target Iranian oil and petrochemical sales in a bid to reduce Iran's energy exports.

Manila is still seeking the release of 17 Filipinos taken hostage by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis in November after the rebels seized their ship in the Red Sea. In a separate incident, two Filipino crew members were killed and three others injured in a Houthi missile attack on their ship in the Gulf of Aden on March 6. — AFP

Amir hails people of determination...

Continued from Page 1

Hajri pledged to maintain and continue serving the dear homeland. Addressing HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal, he conveyed congratulations and greetings of all disabled people to HH the Amir on the holy month of Ramadan. Hajri said "Kuwait, upon the wise leadership of Your Highness, implements all laws in all governmental agencies in the country", affirming obedience and loyalty to HH the Amir for the public interest of Kuwait's present and future.

He lauded the good of the Al-Sabah Family, indicating that generations are taught to love and be loyal to this country to raise its flag in international arenas. "Kuwait has participated in multiple international arenas and won the presidency of IWBF Asia Oceania for a four-year term, thanks to the directives of Your Highness that were implemented by the Public Authority for Sport," Hajri said, addressing HH the Amir.

This came in recognition of Kuwait for its support for sports of the disabled, he said, noting that Kuwait's disabled players have varied medals that enable them to take part in 2024 Paris Olympics. Hajri stated that the club communicates with all government bodies and offers proposals and views regarding the disabled and the need to integrate them into society. They have served the country and are determined to continue their efforts for the sake of the dear homeland, he concluded, giving some examples of successful disabled dignitaries in the country. A documentary on the achievements of the club was

displayed and HH the Amir was given a souvenir on this occasion.

HH the Amir Sheikh Mishal, accompanied by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad, also visited Kuwait Blind Association on Tuesday, marking the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. Upon arrival, HH the Amir was received by Minister of Social Affairs, Family and Children Affairs Sheikh Feras Al-Sabah, Board Manager of the Association Faye Al-Azmi and the Association's Secretary Mansour Al-Enezi. HH the Amir delivered a speech on the occasion, where he expressed his best wishes on the holy month of Ramadan and asked Almighty Allah for His blessings on all Arab and Islamic nations.

HH the Amir noted that today he marks and praises the exerted efforts and roles of "our visionary sons in the Kuwait Blind Association". "Through their participation in sports tournaments at the regional and international levels, and their hosting last February of the Asian Blind Union Conference, with the participation of 24 countries, consolidated the State of Kuwait's interest in people of determination, especially the blind, at the legislative and executive levels," HH the Amir added.

HH the Amir also congratulated the recommendation of the secretary of the association for the position of Secretary-General of the Asian Federation and his selection as a member of the executive committee of the World Blind Union. HH the Amir also directed relevant state institutions to follow up on the issues and needs of the Blind Association members, support their activities, and provide devices, machines and tools that help them in their lives, including job opportunities that suit their circumstances and encourage their distinguished determination. — KUNA

umenting... acts amounting to genocide in Gaza," Islamabad's representative said. "The occupation force's dangerous and ruthless push for a final solution to the Palestinian question is plain for all to see, as its forces encircle Rafah like vultures and its ravenous land grab continues unabated in the West Bank."

Egypt, speaking for Arab group countries, affirmed their support for Albanese's mandate and said they were gravely concerned about the Zionist entity's "structured and systematic attack to make the Gaza Strip uninhabitable". And Qatar, on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council, thanked Albanese for her report and demanded the international community "put an end to genocide being

Zionists pound Gaza, target...

Continued from Page 1

Zionist tanks and armored vehicles have massed around Nasser Hospital, the Gaza health ministry said, adding that shots were fired but no raid had yet been launched. The Palestinian Red Crescent warned that thousands were trapped inside and "their lives are in danger".

Gaza has endured almost six months of war and a siege that has cut off most food, water, fuel and other supplies, and the UN has warned that its 2.4 million people are on the brink of a "man-made famine". The flow of aid trucks from Egypt has slowed amid the war and due to lengthy Zionist cargo inspections.

Donor governments have airdropped food into Gaza where desperate crowds have rushed towards aid packages drifting down on parachutes. At least 18 people have been reported killed in stampedes or drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. Hamas has urged an end to the airdrops and called for stepped-up road deliveries instead. The United States said it would keep airdropping humanitarian supplies while also pushing for more overland deliveries.

The Zionist entity's campaign has killed at least 32,414 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the health ministry. The UN Security Council on Monday passed its first resolution demanding an "immediate ceasefire" in Gaza and the release of the captives. The United States, which had blocked previous resolutions, abstained, drawing an angry rebuke from Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

perpetrated by the (Zionist) war machinery".

In her speech, Albanese told the top UN rights body that the Zionist entity had "destroyed Gaza". "When genocidal intent is so conspicuous, so ostentatious, as it is in Gaza, we cannot avert our eyes: we must confront genocide, we must prevent it and we must punish it," she said. "The genocide in Gaza is the most extreme stage of a long-standing settler-colonial process of erasure of the native Palestinians."

Special rapporteurs are independent experts appointed by the Human Rights Council, although they do not speak on behalf of the UN. In response, Russia said it was "horrified" by the Zionist entity's mil-

The right-wing premier canceled a Zionist delegation's planned visit to Washington, although Defense Minister Yoav Gallant was already there. Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin stressed, before meeting Gallant, that "the number of civilian casualties is far too high, and the amount of humanitarian aid is far too low" in Gaza. Despite the tensions, Rear Admiral Hagari said security cooperation was closer than ever, "encompassing the entire US military and the US intelligence services".

Zionist and Hamas envoys have engaged in weeks of indirect talks aimed at halting the fighting, but both sides said this week the talks were failing. Qatari foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari has said that, although the CIA and Mossad chiefs had left Doha, the talks were "ongoing" at a technical level.

Hamas leader Ghazi Hamad charged that the Zionist entity "is being intransigent and wants to keep the war going, despite international positions and in defiance to UN Security Council's decision to cease fire during Ramadan". "There hasn't been any progress in ceasefire talks or negotiations for prisoners' exchange," he said. "The (Zionist) government's procrastination is just a way to gain time and keep their aggression going."

Amid the bloodiest ever Gaza conflict, the Zionist entity has also exchanged daily cross-border fire with Hamas ally Hezbollah based in southern Lebanon. The hostilities, in which the Zionist entity has also targeted Hamas militants, have raised fears of all-out conflict between the Zionist entity and Hezbollah, which fought a devastating war in 2006. Hezbollah fired a barrage of rockets into the Zionist entity Wednesday killing a person, after the Zionist entity carried out a deadly predawn strike in south Lebanon. — AFP

itary operation that had seen "civilian infrastructure targeted" while China said it was ready to facilitate peace talks. The European Union called for "proper and independent investigations on all allegations" and while appalled by the civilian death toll it recognized the Zionist entity's right to self-defense.

Albanese's speech concluded to applause in the chamber. The Zionist entity was not present, nor was its chief ally the United States. The Zionist entity has long been harshly critical of Albanese, and on Monday immediately rejected her report as an "obscene inversion of reality". The United States called her mandate "biased against (the Zionist entity)". — AFP

Nations rally behind expert who...

Continued from Page 1

laid bare its "genocidal intent" to "rid Palestine of Palestinians". Dozens of diplomats, mostly representing Arab and Muslim countries but also Latin America, took the floor to defend her mandate and her work.

Pakistan, speaking for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, backed her call for sanctions and an arms embargo. "We commend your courage in doc-

International

Trump hit with gag order in NY hush money case

Judge blasts Trump's 'threatening, inflammatory, denigrating' statements

NEW YORK: The New York judge presiding over Donald Trump's trial for allegedly making pre-election hush money payments to a porn star slapped a partial gag order on the former president on Tuesday.

Judge Juan Merchan ordered Trump not to publicly attack potential witnesses, prosecutors, court staff, their families or prospective jurors. The move came just hours after the Republican presidential candidate lashed out at the judge and his daughter in a series of posts on Truth Social.

The 77-year-old Trump described Merchan as a "true and certified Trump hater who suffers from a very serious case of Trump Derangement Syndrome." "In other words, he hates me," Trump said. "Judge Merchan should recuse himself, he cannot give me a fair trial."

The former Republican president also said Merchan's daughter is "a senior executive at a Super Liberal Democrat firm." Merchan is the third judge overseeing a

case against Trump to issue a gag order.

Judge Arthur Engoron, who presided over a business fraud case in New York that resulted in a \$454 million fine for Trump, also issued a limited gag order. So did District Judge Tanya Chutkan in Washington, who is overseeing the federal case against Trump on charges of seeking to overturn the 2020 election results.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, who brought the hush money case against Trump, had asked Merchan last month to issue a "narrowly tailored" gag order to "protect the integrity of this criminal proceeding." Merchan said Trump was free to comment about the judge himself and Bragg but not the other prosecutors in the case.

'Threatening, inflammatory'

Steven Cheung, a Trump spokesman, denounced the gag order. "Judge Merchan's unconstitutional gag order prevents President Trump — the leading

candidate for President of the United States — from engaging in core political speech," Cheung said in a statement.

"American voters have a fundamental right to hear the uncensored voice of the leading candidate for the highest office in the land," he added. In his order Tuesday, Merchan noted that Trump had a history of making public statements which were "threatening, inflammatory, denigrating." "The uncontested record reflecting the defendant's prior extrajudicial statements establishes a sufficient risk to the administration of justice," the judge said.

Merchan added that "there exists no less restrictive means to prevent such risk" besides imposing a gag order. Merchan's move comes one day after he set April 15 as the date for the start of the first ever criminal trial of a former president.

Trump faces charges of falsifying business records for payments made by his lawyer Michael Cohen on the eve of the 2016 presidential election to porn star Stormy Daniels to make sure she



NEW YORK: Former US president Donald Trump speaks to the press in a hallway outside the courtroom at Manhattan Criminal Court on March 25, 2024. — AFP

did not publicize a sexual encounter. The twice-impeached Trump faces dozens of charges linked to his alleged conspiracy

to overturn the 2020 election and also his hoarding of top-secret documents taken from the White House. — AFP

'Communist mayor' embarks on conquest of Istanbul district

ISTANBUL: Fatih Macoglu, the popular "Communist Mayor" of a city in eastern Turkey, is now vying for control of a vibrant and hip Istanbul district along the Asian banks of the Bosphorus.

In 2019, he was elected mayor of Tunceli, a majority Kurdish Alevi city in eastern Anatolia known for being extremely secular and left-leaning. During his five-year term, he won plaudits for knocking down the doors of his office as a form of transparency.

This time, in the March 31 elections, he is setting his sights on the Kadikoy district of Istanbul, a bastion of the secular opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). The charismatic, mustached 55-year-old is standing as a candidate for the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), which has no seats in the national parliament.

In an interview with AFP during his election campaign in Kadikoy, Macoglu said his experience as mayor proved good governance was possible. "The world is getting worse and I believe the Socialists can reverse this trend," he said. "Socialists are competent to rule this country and this world."

'Honest approach'

In 2019, Macoglu became the first Communist mayor of Tunceli, a city that was formerly known as Dersim and that has a turbulent history. He took over a city council that had been run by the pro-Kurdish HDP party — until it was handed to a government-appointed trustee in the wake of a failed coup in 2016 that aimed to topple long-standing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Macoglu refused to use his official car and posted his council's finances on a banner hanging on the front of his office building to show people how he spent their money. He opened a cooperative to promote organic honey and chickpeas, whose sales funded university students from poor families, and provided free transport for students.

"I closely followed Macoglu's successful practices. I was impressed by his honest approach to politics," said Sevgi Celik, a 42-year-old resident of Kadikoy. "I have faith he will do the same here in Kadikoy," Celik added. "I think we are not going through good times. The country in general is not in a



ISTANBUL: Mayor of Tunceli Fatih Mehmet Macoglu 55 (center) meets with supporters at Kadikoy, in Istanbul during his campaign on February 11, 2024. — AFP

good state. For things to get better, we need better people in power."

Murat Karabiyik, 46, agreed the current order needed to change. "We cannot find shelter. We cannot eat. We cannot drink. We cannot travel. This must change," he said. "People affiliated to political parties are usually chasing profits. This is not the case here. God willing, we will change this." Asked if he would stick to the same novel approach if elected mayor of Kadikoy, Macoglu said: "Of course. Our city functions because we have a program."

Macoglu's bid for Kadikoy — an arty neighborhood with lively cafes, bars and galleries — drew rebuke from supporters of the CHP and the pro-Kurdish DEM party, which is also standing in Istanbul.

They said Macoglu should have run for a working class district of Istanbul or else stayed in Tunceli. Macoglu told AFP he found the criticism useful but stressed he was not opposed to either of the opposition parties. "We are Socialists. We want to explain to the public that there are better programs. We are not against any party."

'We will win'

Some commentators say Macoglu could draw votes from people disappointed with the CHP, which took control of Istanbul in 2019 from Erdogan's Islamic conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP). "You can be assured that we will win," he said confidently.

Macoglu has promised transparency, freedoms and accountability, including opening the council's resources to the general public, rather than reserving the funds for individuals or monopolies. He said he would be inclusive towards all groups — including the LGBTQ community, which freely expresses itself in Kadikoy and is frequently attacked by Erdogan's right-wing alliance.

Asked if the "Communist mayor" nickname bothered him, Macoglu said: "Not at all. It makes me happy." "Communism is a way of life. The capitalist, imperialist system has given Communists a very bad image that they don't deserve," he said. "Wherever I go in the country, there are millions of people who say ... 'If this is Communism, it's very good.'" — AFP

New leader for Al-Qaeda's Yemen branch

DUBAI: Saad al-Awlaki has taken the helm of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula after the death of its former leader, looking to unite the extremist group and change course after a steep decline. Based in war-torn Yemen's south, AQAP is considered by Washington as the Sunni Muslim Al-Qaeda network's most dangerous branch. It has claimed numerous high-profile attacks in the United States and Europe, including the 2015 assault on Charlie Hebdo magazine in France's capital that killed 12 people, but these have dropped in recent years.

AQAP announced earlier this month that Awlaki had succeeded Khalid Batarfi, who died after a long illness, according to Yemeni sources close to the group. Like other sources AFP has spoken to, they requested anonymity to discuss the extremist group.

Assem al-Sabri, an expert on jihadist groups, said the decline in AQAP's actions was due to internal divisions, "a financial crisis" and fighting against rival Yemeni forces. Awlaki, a Yemeni national wanted by the United States, could herald "a major renewal for the organization", Sabri said.

The new leader has good relations with powerful Yemeni tribes — particularly in his home governorate of Shabwa, an AQAP stronghold — that could revitalize the group, a tribal official told AFP.

Born in 2009 from the merger of Al-Qaeda's Yemeni and Saudi factions, AQAP grew and developed in the chaos of Yemen's war which since 2015 has pitted Iran-backed Houthi rebels against a Saudi-led coalition. But AQAP is now just one of many armed groups in southern Yemen, including Islamic State group jihadists and UAE-trained separatist militias who back the internationally recognized government against the Houthis.

Since the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack — AQAP's most notorious — and a 2019 mass shooting at a US naval base in Florida, internal crises have put a brake on its operations abroad, Sabri said. In February 2020, AQAP suffered a major blow when its powerful leader Qassim al-Rimi was killed in a US strike.

Rimi was replaced with Batarfi, who was in turn succeeded by Awlaki — wanted over calls "for attacks against the United States and its allies", according to the US State Department. Washington is offering a reward of up to \$6 million for information leading to his identification or location. — AFP

India summons US diplomat after notes on jailed politician

NEW DELHI: India on Wednesday summoned a top United States diplomat after Washington said it was "closely watching" events following the jailing of a senior opposition leader weeks ahead of parliamentary elections.

The US State Department had urged India to ensure a "fair, transparent, and timely legal process" for Arvind Kejriwal, chief minister of the capital Delhi, who was arrested last week in connection with a long-running corruption probe. "We take strong objection to the remarks," India's foreign ministry said in a statement. "In diplomacy, states are expected to be respectful of the sovereignty and internal affairs of others."

Local broadcasters showed the senior US diplomat Gloria Berbena entering India's foreign ministry. There was no immediate response from the US embassy. Last week, Germany raised its concerns about the arrest of Kejriwal, a key leader in an opposition alliance formed to compete against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in elections beginning next month. The foreign ministry said it had also summoned Germany's deputy ambassador on Saturday.

Kejriwal's government is accused of receiving kickbacks while handing out liquor licenses to private companies. He has denied the charges, and supporters



NEW DELHI: Supporters of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) protest against the arrest of AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal on March 22, 2024. — AFP

say his arrest is meant to sideline challengers to Modi before next month's election — accusations the foreign ministry rejected. "India's legal processes are based on an independent judiciary which is committed to objective and timely outcomes," it added.

India's main financial investigation agency, the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which arrested Kejriwal, has launched probes into at least four other state chief ministers or their family

members. Critics have accused Modi of politicizing India's justice system.

Nearly a billion Indians will vote to elect a new government in six-week-long parliamentary elections starting on April 19, the largest democratic exercise in the world. Many analysts see Modi's re-election as a foregone conclusion, partly due to the resonance of his assertive Hindu-nationalist politics with members of the country's majority faith. — AFP

2 dead, 10 injured in Russian attacks on Ukraine

KYIV: Russian attacks on eastern and southern Ukraine killed two people and wounded 10 others, officials said Wednesday, as Kyiv called for Patriot air defense systems to battle a surge in missile strikes.

Moscow has escalated its aerial attacks on Ukraine in the past few weeks, targeting key infrastructure including power stations in retaliation for fatal bombardment of Russia's border regions. A 55-year-old man was killed by artillery fire in Ukraine's southeastern city of Nikopol, Dnipropetrovsk region head Sergiy Lysak said. The governor of Ukraine's southern Kherson region, which is partially occupied by Russia, said one woman had been killed in a drone attack on the village of Mykhailivka.

Ukrainian forces retook swathes of the Black Sea territory in late 2022 but Russia has been shelling recaptured towns and villages since. "A 61-year-old local resident was fatally wounded in her own home," the official, Oleksandr Prokudin, wrote on social media.

The governor of the neighboring Mykolaiv region said later that a Russian ballistic missile had struck the coastal territory, leaving six wounded, with one in a critical condition.

Separately, the governor of the eastern Kharkiv region, Oleg Sinegubov, said three men and one woman all over the age of 50 were injured in separate strikes on towns and villages

in the region. The mayor of the region's capital, also called Kharkiv, said that a strike on a residential neighborhood had left "dead and wounded", but did not give details about casualties.

'Little time'

The Ukrainian air force said Russia had launched 13 Iranian-designed attack drones at Ukraine overnight and that 10 were downed over the Kharkiv region, the neighboring Sumy region and near the capital Kyiv.

During an online briefing Wednesday, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called for urgent deliveries of air defense systems to ward off an increase in ballistic missile strikes.

"The peculiarity of the current Russian attacks is the intensive use of ballistic missiles that can reach targets at extremely high speeds, leaving little time for people to take cover and causing significant destruction," Kuleba said. "Patriot and other similar systems are defensive by definition. They are designed to protect lives, not take them," he said. Ukraine has been forced onto the defensive in the past few months as it struggles with ammunition shortages and a hold up to a \$60 billion aid package from Washington. It has also been forced to concede ground to Russia on the eastern front in recent months, warning earlier this week of "difficult" battles around the eastern city of Chasiv Yar. — AFP

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024

Business

Japan unveils plan to develop next-generation passenger jet

Public-private project aims to use ‘new environmental technologies’

TOKYO: Japan announced plans on Wednesday to develop a next-generation passenger jet over the next decade after the last struggling attempt, led by a private company, was scrapped a year ago. The new public-private project aims to use “new environmental technologies” such as hydrogen or hybrid electrics, a statement from the ministry of economy, trade and industry said.

“It is important for us to build next-generation aircraft based on technologies where Japan is competitive, while also contributing to the decarbonation of air transport,” the statement said.

The new plane will be ready after 2035, an economy ministry official said after a closed-door meeting of politicians, experts and businesspeople to discuss Japan’s aviation industry strategy.

Over the next 10 years, investment totaling five trillion yen (\$33 billion) is needed in the industry including for the development of the new passenger plane, the official said. The fresh push to build the nation’s first homemade airliner in more than half a century comes after Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) abandoned a much-anticipated attempt in February 2023.

The troubled project to develop a twin-engine plane for short-to-medium haul flights was ditched 10 years after the jet was due for commercial rollout, having suffered technical glitches and repeated delivery delays. “For the Japanese aircraft industry to achieve sustainable growth, we cannot stay satisfied with our position as a

parts supplier,” Kazuchika Iwata, state minister for economy, trade and industry, told the committee in comments open to press at the start of Wednesday’s meeting.

“In the new business fields of carbon-neutral technologies, including hydrogen, we aim to take a leading position” and partner with global players to develop a narrow-body plane, he said. China showed off its first domestically produced passenger jet in Singapore last month, aiming to challenge the dominance of Airbus and Boeing with its single-aisle model. Japan last launched a commercial airliner in 1962 -- the YS-11 turboprop that was discontinued about a decade later.

Hydrogen fuel does not emit carbon dioxide when burned, making it an exciting prospect for Japan which is targeting carbon neutrality by 2050. But environmental campaigners are skeptical about its use without a reliable supply chain for so-called “green” hydrogen, produced from renewable energy sources. “Nothing concrete has been decided yet, but possibilities include hybrid electrics, hydrogen combustion, hydrogen FC—these are possible next-generation technologies we’re looking at and aiming to deepen our research of” in developing the new aircraft, the economy ministry official told AFP.

Edward Bourlet, an analyst at CLSA in Japan covering MHI, told AFP that Mitsubishi Heavy’s jet was a “massive cost burden” and “a nightmare project”. Developing the plane in a consor-



Mitsubishi Heavy Industries’ SpaceJet is thought to have failed in part because the entire project was shouldered by one company.

tium can spread risks but can also make such a project harder to coordinate, he said. “The main issue here will probably be the hydrogen side of things if that’s what they’re going for,” he said. “Conceptually, it’s a great idea,” and “if anyone’s

going to develop a hydrogen aircraft then I suppose Japan is well positioned to do so,” Bourlet added. But “the benefits of such and the costs associated with developing that sounds a bit precarious to me”. — AFP

California looks to Europe to rein in AI

SAN FRANCISCO: California, home to Silicon Valley, is eager to rein in the deployment of artificial intelligence and is looking to Europe’s tough-on-big-tech approach for inspiration. The richest state in the United States by GDP, California is a hotbed of no-holds-barred tech innovation, but lawmakers in state capital Sacramento want to give the industry laws and guardrails it has largely been spared in the internet age.

Brussels has enacted a barrage of laws on US-dominated tech and sprinted to pass the AI Act after OpenAI’s Microsoft-backed ChatGPT arrived on the scene in late 2022, unleashing a global AI race.

“What we’re trying to do is actually learn from the Europeans, but also work with the Europeans, and figure out how to put regulations in place on AI,” said David Harris, senior policy advisor at the California Initiative for Technology and Democracy. As they have in the past with EU laws on private data, lawmakers in California are looking to recent European legislation on AI, especially given the little hope of equivalent national legislation out of Washington. There are at least 30 different bills proposed by California state legislators that relate to various aspects of AI, according to Harris, who said he has advised officials here and in Europe on such laws. Proposed laws in California range from requiring AI makers to reveal what was used to train models to banning election ads containing any computer-generated features.

“One of the aspects I think is really important is the question of how we deal with deepfakes or fake text created to look like a human being is sending you messages,” Harris told AFP. State assembly member Gail Pellerin is backing a bill she says would essentially ban the spreading of deceptive digital content created with generative AI in the months leading up to and the weeks following an election.

Yen hits 34-year low, equity markets mixed

LONDON: The yen plunged Wednesday to a 34-year dollar low on fervent speculation that the Bank of Japan could step into markets to support the unit, having hiked interest rates last week for the first time since the global financial crisis. The yen dropped to 151.97 to the dollar in Asian trading hours, touching the lowest point since 1990 before strengthening somewhat in the European session.

A top Bank of Japan official indicated that it would press ahead with a loose monetary policy, even after it pulled the plug on its ultra-aggressive monetary stimulus program to deliver its first hike in borrowing costs since 2007.

The weaker yen helped spur a rally in Tokyo’s benchmark Nikkei stocks index as exporters benefited, making it Asia’s best performer. Other global stock markets diverged before this week’s US data, which is expected to shed light on the outlook for Federal Reserve interest rates.



ROME: Students stand next to a 3D printer and the reconstruction of archaeological finds during the RomeCup 2024 focusing on “Artificial Intelligence and Robotics for the challenge of holistic sustainability”, an event dedicated to the frontiers of technological development, at the University of Tor Vergata, in Rome. — AFP

“Bad actors who are utilizing this are really hoping to create chaos in an election,” Pellerin said.

Industry association NetChoice is dead set against importing aspects of European legislation on AI, or any other EU tech regulation. “They are taking, essentially, a European approach on artificial intelligence – which is that we must ban the technology,” said Carl Szabo, the general counsel of the association, which advocates for light touch regulation of tech.

“Outlawing AI won’t stop (anything). It’s bad because bad guys don’t follow the law,” Szabo argued.

“That’s what makes them bad guys.” US computer software giant Adobe, like most tech giants, worked with Europe on the AI Act, according to Adobe General Counsel and Chief Trust Officer Dana Rao.

At the heart of the EU AI Act is a risk-based approach, with AI practices deemed more risky getting more scrutiny. “We feel good about where the AI Act ended up” with its high-risk, low-risk approach, said Rao. Already, Adobe engineers carry out “impact

assessments” to rate risk before making AI products available, according to Rao. “You want to think about nuclear safety, about cybersecurity, about when AI is making substantial decisions over human rights,” Rao said.

In California, Rao said he expected the problem of deepfakes to be the first to fall under the authority of a new law. Assembly Bill 602 would criminalize non-consensual deepfake pornography while Assembly Bill 730 bans the use of AI deepfakes during election campaign season.

To fight this, Adobe joined other companies to create “content credentials” that Rao equated to a “nutrition label” for digital content. Assemblywoman Pellerin expects AI laws adopted in California to be replicated in other states. “People are watching California,” Pellerin said, with a slew of US states also working on their own AI deepfake bills.

“We’re all in this together; we have to stay ahead of the folks that are trying to wreak havoc in an election,” she said. — AFP

ings season. Hong Kong, Shanghai, Seoul, Jakarta and Wellington were down, while Sydney, Singapore, Taipei, Mumbai, Bangkok and Manila clung onto gains. In Europe, London registered a modest loss while Frankfurt and Paris held onto positive territory. The mixed performance followed another soft day on Wall Street with observers warning the latest equities rally may have run out of steam. — AFP



TOKYO: People walk past an electronic board showing a share price of the Nikkei index of the Tokyo Stock Exchange (left) and the rate of the Japanese yen versus the US dollar (right) along a street in Tokyo on March 27, 2024. — AFP



HANOI: Chairman of Tan Hoang Minh group Do Anh Dung (center) is escorted by police officers to a court for his trial on fraud charges in Hanoi. — AFP

Vietnam jails luxury property tycoon over \$355m bond scam

HANOI: A top Vietnamese luxury property tycoon was sentenced to eight years in prison, state media said Wednesday, after he was accused of cheating thousands of investors in a \$355 million bond scam. It is the latest case in a sweeping anti-corruption probe targeting high-flying business leaders that is roiling the communist country. More than 4,000 people, including officials and senior business figures, have been indicted in more than 2,000 cases since 2021.

Hanoi People’s Court sentenced Do Anh Dung, head of the Tan Hoang Minh group which specialises in luxury offices and apartments, to eight years in jail for fraud, according to Tuoi Tre news site.

Dung’s son, Do Hoang Viet, was also sentenced to three years imprisonment, while 13 other defendants were given sentences of up to two and half years in jail.

Dung and his co-defendants were accused of illegally acquiring \$355 million in a bond sale to 6,630 investors. “The jury assessed that the defendants’ crimes were particularly serious, directly infringing on the property ownership rights of other people,” according to Tuoi Tre report.

According to previous state media reports, by January 2022 the Tan Hoang Minh group was struggling with debts of some \$810 million because of stalled projects and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The defendants sold bonds to raise capital, promising investors high returns, but embezzled the \$355 million raised, state media reported. State media reported that Dung and his son have already repaid the \$355 million. The verdict comes as the country’s biggest ever fraud case, Truong My Lan, chairwoman of the Van Thinh Phat property development group, along with 85 other defendants, is currently on trial in Ho Chi Minh City accused of embezzling \$12.5 billion. Vietnamese prosecutors have called for her to face the death penalty, with the trial expected to end in late April. — AFP

Business

China's president Xi meets US business executives in Beijing

Beijing seeks to woo foreign investment, reassure American firms

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping met with representatives of US businesses Wednesday as Beijing seeks to woo foreign investment and reassure American firms in the face of a slowing economy. Officials are keen to bring in investment to kickstart growth as they battle a range of headwinds including a prolonged property-sector crisis, soaring youth unemployment and a global slowdown that is hampering demand for Chinese goods.

Hosting the group of executives at Beijing's Great Hall of the People, state broadcaster CCTV showed Xi chuckling as he expounded on what he characterized as the mutual reliance between Beijing and Washington. Among the attendees was Cristiano Amon, CEO of Qualcomm, a major producer of semi-conductors — which are at the forefront of US-China tech rivalry — a photo released by Beijing's foreign ministry showed.

Also in attendance was Stephen Schwarzman, CEO of private equity giant Blackstone. "Differences will always exist, because people are different, and even people from the same family are different, too," Xi said. "But we should seek common ground and build more consensus. This is true between nations and as well as between family members," he added.

Xi said that "the history of China-US relations is a history of friendly exchanges between the two peoples". "People from all walks of life in both coun-

tries should have more exchanges and more cooperation." CCTV did not directly name the participants, but photos indicated that Apple CEO Tim Cook — who recently visited China — was not in attendance.

Cook last week opened a new Apple store in Shanghai before making an appearance with other top executives at the China Development Forum in Beijing. "I think China's really opening up, and I'm so happy to be here," Cook told a reporter from CGTN on the sidelines of the forum, according to a video posted on one of the state-run broadcaster's social media accounts.

Economic growth rates in China have been trending downwards for years, and Beijing this month set an annual target of "around five percent" — significantly lower than the breakneck rates that powered the country's meteoric rise to prosperity. The crucial China-US economic relationship has also suffered as the two powers clash on flashpoint issues from technology and trade to human rights as well as over the self-ruled island of Taiwan and the South China Sea.

US firms in China have increasingly complained about what they see as an unfair business environment, with limited protection for intellectual property and preferential treatment afforded to domestic competitors. Those fears were compounded last year by a broad crackdown on US consulting firms operating in China.



Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with top US executives to encourage foreign investment in his country on March 27.

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo warned in August that business in China could become "too risky" for US firms without changes to the regulatory environment. China has rebuffed those fears, touting its openness to foreign investment and promising

to do more to help them. Last November, Xi spoke to US business leaders following a summit with President Joe Biden in San Francisco, promising to "build more bridges and pave more roads for people-to-people interactions". — AFP

Gulf Bank expands 'Ayadi' service to branches and ITMs

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank is spreading the joy of Eid Al-Fitr with its customers and the public, by extending its "Ayadi" service to most of its branches and ITMs across Kuwait. The "Ayadi" service is now available at most of Gulf Bank branches, totaling over 50 in number. Additionally, Interactive Teller Machines (ITMs), are available at various locations including Crystal Tower, Al-Adan, Al-Salam (South Surra), Fahaeel (Xcite Mall), Hawally, Kuwait International Airport (TI), Mishref, Al-Fanar Mall, Al-Khiran Mall and Sabah Al-Ahmad branch.

The bank offers its private and priority banking clients the chance to schedule cash deliveries through the concierge service. They can do so by dialing 22969955, specifying their preferred denominations, and arranging the delivery time. The "Ayadi" service provides customers with fresh

banknotes in denominations of KD 20, KD 10, KD 5, and KD 1, addressing the increased demand for new banknotes during the Eid Al-Fitr celebrations. Additionally, Gulf Bank offers its customers the Pay Link service via its mobile application featuring easy and simple steps.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining robust developments in sustainability at environmental, social and governance levels through diverse sustainability initiatives, strategically selected to benefit the Bank both internally and externally. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



News in Brief

H&M's net profit doubles

STOCKHOLM, Sweden: H&M said Wednesday its net profit more than doubled in the first quarter as the world's second biggest fashion retailer worked to control costs. The Swedish company reported a profit-after-tax of 1.2 billion kronor (\$113.3 million) in the December-to-February period. "Through continued cost control, better precision in our collections and close cooperation with our suppliers, we now stand better equipped," chief executive Daniel Erver said in a results statement. "We are fully focused on driving profitable growth going forward," Erver said. The group's operating profit nearly tripled to 2.1 billion kronor, well above the 1.3 billion kronor forecast by analysts in a Bloomberg survey. — AFP

Spanish inflation picks up in March

MADRID: Spanish inflation accelerated in March due mainly to higher energy costs, preliminary official data showed Wednesday. Consumer prices rose 3.2 percent on an annual basis, up from 2.8 percent in February, national statistics office INE said in a statement. The main factor pushing up inflation was a rise in the price of electricity and fuel, which offset slower growth in food and non-alcoholic drink prices, it added. Spanish inflation hit a record 10.8 percent in July 2022, its highest level since 1985 as Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent consumer prices soaring, but it has since eased. Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in 2022 put in place a series of measures to help households cope with higher inflation such as free commuter rail travel and a lower value-added tax on energy bills and some food items which it plans to start phasing out this year. — AFP

Danish economy grows 1.9%

COPENHAGEN: The Danish economy grew 1.9 percent last year but would have flatlined without its pharmaceutical industry and the huge success of weight-loss drug maker Novo Nordisk, official data showed Wednesday. National data agency Statistics Denmark said the sector's contribution to growth amounted to 1.9 percent. "If it is deducted from GDP growth, you get a big zero," the agency's chief accounting consultant, Jonas Dan Petersen, said on X (formerly Twitter). Novo Nordisk's net profit soared by 51 percent in 2023 to 83.7 billion kroner (\$12.1 billion) as sales of diabetes medication Ozempic and obesity drug Wegovy have boomed. — AFP

Swedish CB signals May or June rate cut

STOCKHOLM: Sweden's central bank on Wednesday kept its key interest rate at a 16-year high, but forecast a possible cut in May or June if inflation stays under control. The Riksbank said that while "inflation is in the process of stabilizing at the target" of two percent, it added that "inflationary pressures are still somewhat elevated." Swedish inflation slowed sharply in February to 4.5 percent year-on-year. The bank's benchmark indicator, adjusted for fixed interest rates (CPIF), reached 2.5 percent. "It is likely that the policy rate can be cut in May or June if inflation prospects remain favorable," the Riksbank said in a statement. But it added that given the high inflation seen in recent years, its executive board "wants further confirmation that inflation will stabilize close to the target." — AFP

Reforms spark modern-day gold rush in Uzbekistan

SOYKECHAR, Uzbekistan: Sifting through a greyish mixture of sand and pebble in the steppe of Uzbekistan, Khislat Ochilov was searching for gold. He is one of hundreds of new prospectors trying to strike it rich in a modern-day gold rush in the Central Asian country, chock-full of the precious metal.

A right once preserved for state mining firms, recent regulatory changes designed to boost the economy mean anyone can now hunt for gold. Ochilov scanned the shiny flakes that appeared on his panning mat, submerged in a pool of water. Finally, he spotted a piece the size of a grain of rice. "Not bad. Though my record is seven grams," the 25-year-old told AFP while out in the Uzbek steppe, near the southwestern village of Soykechar. Nearby, Sardor Mardiyev, 28, was hard at work digging through the earth in the vast Navoi region, a district larger than Portugal.

He drives his excavator 12 hours a day, six days a week as part of a frenzy for the metal that officials hope will boost Uzbekistan's output. Last year, the country produced 110.8 tons of gold, putting it tenth place globally, and its central bank was the second largest net seller in the world at around 25 tons, behind only Kazakhstan, according to the World Gold Council.

For Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev — who sees himself as a reformer opening up and liberalizing his country's economy after years of isolation and centralization — it is not enough. He has ordered gold production to be increased by 50 percent by 2030. The potential is there — only 20 percent of Uzbekistan's subsoil has been explored to date.

Mirziyoyev, in power since 2016, has also called for gold bars weighing up to one kilogram to be sold in the hopes of drawing more tourists to his

landlocked Central Asian nation.

Zahit Khudaberdiyev, in his 30s, is among hundreds of entrepreneurs who have decided to try their luck since the regulation change. To join the gold rush he acquired the rights to a plot of land for three years at auction. "Before 2019, we didn't have the right to mine gold. Some did it anyway at the risk of death — it was dangerous," Khudaberdiyev said.

His competition includes Kazakh and Chinese prospectors who secured neighboring plots. If this one doesn't prove bountiful, he said he'd look further afield.

Behind Khudaberdiyev, trucks and diggers bustle with activity. He said they churn up tons of rubble and can



TASHKENT: A woman examines gold jewelry in a gold store in Navoiy, some 500km from Tashkent. — AFP

but the EU's concerns over the technology's harms have grown in parallel.

Brussels especially fears the impact of Russian "manipulation" and "disinformation" on elections taking place in the bloc's 27 member states on June 6-9. In the new guidelines, the commission said the largest platforms "should assess and mitigate specific risks linked to AI, for example by clearly labeling content generated by AI (such as deepfakes)". The commission recommends that big platforms promote official information on elections and "reduce the monetization and virality of content that threatens the integrity of electoral processes" to diminish any risks.

"With today's guidelines we are making full use of all the tools offered by the DSA to ensure platforms comply with their obligations and are not misused to manipulate our elections, while safeguarding freedom of expression," said the EU's top tech enforcer, Thierry Breton. While the guidelines are not legally binding, platforms must explain what other "equally effective" measures they are taking to limit the risks if they do not adhere to them.

The EU can ask for more information and if regulators do not believe there is full compliance, they can

hit the firms with probes that could lead to hefty fines.

Under the new guidelines, the commission also said political advertising "should be clearly labeled as such" before a tougher law on the issue comes into force in 2025. It also urges platforms to put in place mechanisms "to reduce the impact of incidents that could have a significant effect on the election outcome or turnout".

The EU will conduct "stress-tests" with relevant platforms in late April, it said. X has already been under investigation since December over content moderation. And the commission on March 14 pressed Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and four other platforms to provide more information on how they are countering AI risks to polls.

In the past few weeks, several of the companies including Meta have outlined their plans.

TikTok on Tuesday announced more of the measures it was taking including push notifications from April that will direct users to find more "trusted and authoritative" information about the June vote.

TikTok has around 142 million monthly active users in the EU — and is increasingly used as a source of political information among young people. — AFP

Big tech told to identify AI deepfakes

BRUSSELS: The EU called on Facebook, TikTok and other tech titans on Tuesday to crack down on deepfakes and other AI-generated content by using clear labels ahead of Europe-wide polls in June. The recommendation is part of a raft of guidelines published under a landmark content law by the European Commission for digital giants to tackle risks to elections including disinformation.

The EU executive has unleashed a string of measures to clamp down on big tech, especially regarding content moderation. Its biggest tool is the Digital Services Act (DSA) under which the bloc has designated 22 digital platforms as "very large" including Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and X. There has been feverish excitement over artificial intelligence since OpenAI's ChatGPT arrived on the scene in late 2022,

IBS honors 25 NBK employees from graduates of certification program

Honoring ceremony held at NBK headquarters



A group photo taken during the honoring ceremony.

KUWAIT: As part of their strategic partnership, the Institute of Banking Studies (IBS) honored 25 employees from National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) who participated in a number of IBS training programs, as part of the Professional Certification Programs for year 2023, with total 40 certificates obtained by the bank's employees. These programs are accredited by The London Institute of Banking and Finance, which is one of the leading international institutions in professional banking and finance studies.

The honoring was presented in the awarding ceremony held at NBK HQ 38th Floor – Ballroom on 25 March 2024, and attended by Rana Al-Nibari – General Director of IBS.

NBK employees received various professional certificates including: Advanced Certificate in Credit

Management (ACCM), Certified Bank Branch Manager (CBBM), Certified Bank Relationship Manager for High-Net-Worth Customers (CBRM), and Certified Bank Wealth Manager (CBWM).

Commenting on this, Emad Al-Ablani, GM – Head of Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said, “NBK adopts a strategy that promotes employees’ continuous development and improvement of their skills and expertise. To this end, the bank links promotions and financial incentives to academic certificates and training courses obtained by employees, to ensure continuous development for them.”

“In line with our leadership in the banking sector, we regard professional certification as paramount in employees’ career, and always motivate them to pursue

continuous development of their capabilities and skills. In addition to being globally accepted tools for continuous learning and training, these certificates help boost the professional competence of banking sector employees to keep pace with global changes in this regard,” he added.

“NBK holds an unwavering commitment to furnishing future leaders with the necessary training programs and capabilities. These initiatives aim to cultivate adaptability, motivation of others, and delivering advanced and innovative services, thus solidifying the bank’s leadership position among local banks,” he emphasized.

Al-Ablani expressed NBK’s appreciation of the significant contributions of IBS in providing these professional certificates that enrich the banking

business, as they help upskill national talent working in local banks and enhance their capabilities to ensure that they are up to date with the latest advancements in the global banking industry and qualify them to become active contributors to the economic development in Kuwait.

It is worth mentioning that IBS’ initiatives align with NBK’s strategy of investing in human capital, as seen in its consistent endeavors to support, empower, train national talent and provide them with promising employment opportunities. This reflects NBK’s role as one of the top private sector employers of Kuwaitis, and keenness to deliver training programs designed according to advanced scientific methodologies, to help improve employees’ performance.

Plastic ‘interceptor’ tackles trash in Bangkok river



BANGKOK: The Ocean Cleanup’s Interceptor which captures floating plastic and trash before it reaches the ocean is seen during a press visit on the Chao Phraya river in Bangkok on March 26, 2024. — AFP

BANGKOK: Black flies exploded into the air as plastic waste fell from bamboo conveyor belts into skips on a solar-powered barge attempting to remove rubbish from the main river of Thailand’s capital Bangkok. The Ocean Cleanup project launched on the Chao Phraya river, its so-called “interceptor” — a boat-like structure trailing a floating barrier — using the river current to funnel plastic into the barge’s waiting jaws. The global non-profit, founded in 2013 by then-teenager Boyan Slat, aims to remove plastic pollution from the seas in part by preventing synthetic waste from ever reaching the oceans.

“The Chao Phraya is actually the largest, the single largest source, of plastic pollution for the Gulf of Thailand,” Slat told AFP. “The Gulf of Thailand is, of course, very important ecologically, but also economically for tourism and fisheries,” he said. “It’s very important to us to tackle this plastic pollution here.”

The Bangkok project, which has taken roughly two years to launch, is a research collaboration with businesses and local officials and Ocean Cleanup’s fifth “interceptor” project researching pollution prevention in Southeast Asia.

Working with Chulalongkorn University, Ocean Cleanup mapped the Chao Phraya’s currents to determine the best location for the interceptor — a difficult task given the river’s 500-metre (1,640-foot) width and its busy traffic lanes. Positioned at the point where around 60 canals join the main river, ticking bamboo-slatted treadmills carry the collected waste into the barge, where it is deposited into bright blue skips and taken ashore to be disposed of by local authorities.

Penchom Saetang, from the environmental group EARTH Thailand, told AFP that while removing plastic from the river was important, getting chemical pollutants out of the water was also vital to restore the river. “There are several causes (of chemical pollutants) and these include chemical use in the factories, as well as agricultural uses,” she said. — AFP

Sweden to boost plastic recycling with giant plant

MOTALA, Sweden: Discarded crisp bags, ketchup bottles and Tupperware containers speed along conveyor belts at a massive high-tech sorting plant dubbed “Site Zero”, which Sweden hopes will revolutionize its plastic recycling.

Infrared lights, lasers, cameras and even artificial intelligence are used to sort the piles of plastic waste, Mattias Philipsson, CEO of Svensk Plastatervinning, a non-profit organization owned by the plastic industry, explains as he gives a tour of the plant. Located outside the town of Motala, some 200 kilometers (124 miles) southwest of Stockholm, the site has been in operation since late 2023 and is described by the organization as “the world’s largest and most modern facility for plastic recycling”.

Capable of processing 200,000 tons of waste a year, the fully automated plant can isolate 12 different types of plastic, compared to only four in conventional facilities. Its operator hopes upcoming EU legislation requiring new packaging to include a certain amount of recycled plastic will give a boost to the recycling industry.

“We receive all the collected plastic packaging which people have sorted in Swedish households,” Philipsson told AFP at the site, adding that they “have the capacity to handle the equivalent of all of Sweden’s plastic waste.” Thousands of plastic items make their way through an intricate maze of different machines which identify and separate the items into distinct categories, called “fractions.”

On one of the conveyor belts, infrared light is used to scan the packaging as it zooms past, and a strong blast of air whooshes the pieces in different directions depending on the type of plastic.

Among other things, the facility is able to sort out PVC and polystyrene, two fractions that have not previously been able to be reused in new products as such. “The idea is to be part of a circular economy and to reduce the use of fossil fuels,” Philipsson says.

French deficit worsens to ‘very rare’ level

PARIS: France’s budget deficit overshot forecasts in 2023, official figures showed Tuesday, undermining President Emmanuel Macron’s pledge to bring national finances back on track within the next four years. The public deficit jumped to 5.5 percent of gross domestic product, or 154 billion euros (\$167 billion), statistics agency INSEE said.

The slippage was “major” and “very, very rare” in French budgetary history, said Pierre Moscovici, the head of the Cour des Comptes (Court of Accounts), France’s top audit institution tasked with watching over fiscal responsibility. The government had already warned over recent weeks that it would not meet its own deficit estimate of 4.9 percent of GDP, citing the global economic slowdown and the war in Ukraine as key factors.

Fiscal receipts had turned out much worse than



MOTALA, Sweden: Mattias Philipsson, CEO of Svensk Plastatervinning walks with an employee at the Site Zero recycling facility in Motala, Sweden. — AFP

“With our old sorting plant, over 50 percent of the plastic packaging was eventually incinerated because it couldn’t be sorted. Now it’s less than five percent,” he adds. The Scandinavian country is not at the top of the class when it comes to plastic recycling. In 2022, only 35 percent of plastic waste was recycled, according to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), under the EU average of 40 percent.

The incineration of plastic waste, which is used to produce both heat and electricity, accounts for about seven percent of Sweden’s greenhouse gas emissions, according to the agency.

“Swedes are good at recycling in general — metals, paper and glass — because we have been doing this for a long time and have an industry that wants the paper for example,” EPA expert Asa Stenmarck told AFP. But “when it comes to plastics we are not so good,” she added.

forecast last year, the government said Tuesday.

France has announced 10 billion euros of spending cuts to meet its deficit target for this year of 4.4 percent of GDP. “The deficit has gone wild,” said Marc Touati, an economist, on X, formerly Twitter, calling the worsening of public finances “dangerous”.

French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire said Tuesday that he was “totally opposed to any tax increase” to reduce the gap. “We can perfectly make savings on public spending without digging into the pockets of the French,” he told RTL radio.

Like all eurozone members, France is committed to keeping its deficit to below three percent of GDP. That requirement, agreed between European Union members as part of their Stability and Growth Pact, has been suspended since 2020 first to allow countries to deal with the Covid pandemic, and then with the economic fallout of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Le Maire said Tuesday he stood by France’s objective of bringing the deficit back below three percent of GDP by 2027, promising his “total determination” to do so. But given France’s failure to rein in last year’s shortfall, cumulative deficits were making obstacles to success “that much bigger”,

“A lot is not even sorted, which is a big problem and this goes for both households and businesses. So we really need to work on sorting.”

Recycled plastic is still struggling to be widely adopted, as it is on average 35 percent more expensive than newly produced plastic.

Stenmarck noted that some of the fractions sorted by Site Zero are still unusual on the recycling market. “So in a sense, it’s kind of brave since there probably aren’t customers yet,” she explained.

Stenmarck said one way of speeding up its adoption is to legislate, and noted this was underway in Europe with the new Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR).

The 27 EU member states agreed on March 4 that plastic packaging must contain between 10 and 35 percent recycled content, depending on whether it is used for food, by 2030. — AFP

said Mathieu Plane, an economist.

“It’s going to be very difficult,” he told AFP. France’s public sector debt now stands at 110.6 percent of GDP, making the country the third-most indebted country in the eurozone, outperforming only laggards Greece and Italy. The political opposition seized on the government’s budgetary predicament, with conservative Republicans (LR) opposition leader Eric Ciotti calling Macron “the accountant of this disastrous record”. Jean-Francois Husson, who heads up the Senate’s budget commission, said government policy was in a “state of failure”, and Le Maire was now “discredited”.

“This is a meltdown of France’s authority in Europe,” Husson said. “Any private sector company would have sacked Emmanuel Macron for this,” far-right National Rally (RN) leader Jordan Bardella told the FranceInfo broadcaster. Rising deficit and debt levels increase a country’s financing costs, already growing because of high current interest rates, push inflation up and weaken the currency. Budgetary cuts as an attempt to control deficits, meanwhile, can undermine the very economic growth that is needed for higher tax receipts. — AFP

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024

Ramadan celebration: Fusion of tradition and modern charm

Every Ramadan, Egyptians eagerly compete to adorn the streets, homes, shops, and cafes in celebration of this holy month. While lanterns and crescent moons were traditional decorations that symbolizes the arrival of Ramadan, these traditions have diversified and evolved in recent years. They now include modern lighting forms, colorful "Khayamiya" fabrics and beloved traditional Ramadan characters that appeal to people of all ages, enriching the festive atmosphere. — KUNA



Adorning cafes in celebration of Ramadan. — KUNA photos



Adorning shops in celebration of the holy month of Ramadan.



Traditional vending cart decorated for the holy month of Ramadan.



Special pattern for Ramadan decoration.

Beyonce album highlights the Black women changing country music

Twenty-three in Music City / With dreams and high-heeled boots / Singin' for a crowd of blue eyes / Will they want me too?" croons Julie Williams at the Blue Room venue in Nashville. The 26-year-old, who is biracial, is one of many Black female artists carving out space in country music's capital, where predominantly white, male gatekeepers dictate who makes it—and who doesn't. Megastar Beyoncé's highly anticipated country album, out Friday, has cast a spotlight on efforts by Black performers—a vital part of the genre's history—to create a more inclusive Nashville. "Who's excited for Beyoncé's new country album?" hollered Williams to applause. "Is this what all the white girls have been feeling this whole time? Like, when they look at just someone who's at the top of their craft and is just killing it and you get to be like, 'Wow, that could be me'—it's pretty exciting." Speaking to AFP backstage, Williams called Beyoncé's move "a historic moment in bringing Black country to the mainstream."

Williams is among some 200 acts associated with the Black Opry, a three-year-old collective showcasing and amplifying the voices of Black artists working across genres including country, Americana and folk. "I've always been a huge fan of country music throughout my entire life, and I've always felt isolated in that experience. Especially as a Black, queer woman, you don't see a lot of representation—not with the artists, the fans, the marketing material," the Black Opry's founder, Holly G, told AFP. "Once I started Black Opry, I realized we're all there—we're just not given the same platform and opportunities as some of our white counterparts."

'Trying to open the doors'
The institution's name is a direct reference to the Grand Ole Opry, the nearly century-old country performance space whose complicated history has been shaped by Black performers, but which has also spotlighted figures linked to racist

ideologies. The conversation about the marginalization of Black country artists has gained new traction in the wake of Beyoncé's announcement, said Charles Hughes, author of "Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South." "When we start to see things shift behind the scenes," he told AFP, "the effect of the Beyoncé moment... is going to be felt, hopefully, by these communities and musicians and songwriters and fans and others who have been trying to open the doors." Country is a quintessentially



(From left to right) Trea Swindle, Danica Hart, and Devynn Hart take a selfie with Rosevelt Rawls backstage ahead of Chapel Hart's performance at The Grand Ole Opry.

American style of music with influences from Africa: the banjo notably grew out of instruments brought to the Americas and the Caribbean by enslaved people in the 1600s. Yet contemporary country has developed an overwhelmingly white, macho, conservative image, with industry leaders proving resistant to change.

In the 1920s, industry professionals developed the terms "hillbilly" and "race" records to define popular music charts. Those labels grew into country and R&B, respectively. "That initial separation was based only on the color of their skin, and not on the sound of the music," said Holly G. These divisions have persisted, meaning Black musicians—especially Black women, as female artists at large have a demonstrably harder time getting airplay on tastemaking



Trea Swindle, Danica Hart, and Devynn Hart of Chapel Hart stand for a portrait before their performance at The Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee.— AFP photos



Neon signs on Broadway in downtown Nashville, Tennessee.

country radio—face significant barriers.

"The song can sound exactly the same as some other people on the radio, and they're like, 'Yours isn't country,'" Prana Supreme, part of the mother-daughter act O.N.E The Duo, told AFP. "And I'm like, hmm, what's the only difference here?"

'Mover of culture'

Even Beyoncé has said she faced industry resistance. "My hope is that years from now, the mention of an artist's race, as it relates to releasing genres of music, will be irrelevant," Beyoncé said recently.

Dubbing her a "mover of culture," Prana Supreme said Beyoncé's country moment is important not just for showing that Black artists are integral to country, but also to show Black fans that country is for them too. "Southern culture is Black culture," she said.

Her mother Tekitha said Beyoncé is a necessary "champion," not least to show the industry its blind spot: "You need some force that's going to come in and tell the market, 'Oh, wait a

minute, there's money over here that y'all are leaving on the floor.'" Trea Swindle, a member of country act Chapel Hart, said the group has noticed an attention and streaming boost since Beyoncé's announcement, adding: "It's opening up country music as a whole to a completely new demographic."

The members of Chapel Hart grew up in a small southern town, and laugh off anyone who says they "aren't country." "Honey, go to Poplarville, Mississippi—no matter if you're Black, white, Asian, Hispanic—it's Poplarville, and you're going to live that country experience," said Swindle. "Country is a feeling. Country is a way of life."

Holly G said she'll believe mainstream change is afoot when she sees it. "Beyoncé is one of the most powerful celebrities in the world. And she was able to leverage that in order to see success in this space," she said. "But I think that's because the industry is intimidated by Beyoncé—not because they're open to supporting Black women."—AFP

From Wu-Tang to Nashville, a mother-daughter country act



Prana Supreme (left) and Tekitha of O.N.E The Duo, a Mother Daughter Country duo, sing an Acapella version of one of their songs in Nashville, Tennessee. — AFP

Prana Supreme is the daughter of Wu-Tang Clan impresario RZA and longtime vocalist Tekitha, a child of hip-hop royalty whose foray into music was only natural. But Prana and her mother are carving a path all their own, making their way in country music as a family act that transcends labels and fuses what they call America's two great storytelling traditions.

Their group O.N.E The Duo, formally founded in 2020, offers a soulful, twangy brand of country that also incorporates elements of their backgrounds across genres including hip-hop and rock. "Country and hip-hop are really not that different," Prana, 23, told AFP in an interview alongside Tekitha, 50, in Nashville. "These stories are stories of the American people," she continued. "Hip-hop was stories coming out of the projects, out of the hood, out of the voices of the unheard, especially in the Black community. It gave way for our stories to be told."

The same is true of country, she said: "Some of the most important early voices of country are from Black people." When Prana was 14, she approached her mother about making music together. The initial response from Tekitha — whose singing career has featured lending vocals to the Wu-Tang Clan, the storied New York collective whose classics include the seminal album "Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)" — was a hard no.

She didn't want to put her young daughter through the rigors of the industry but, over time, saw Prana was serious about music, both as an art and a business. They began by singing a cappella together, and then gravitated towards acoustic instruments before moving to Nashville and realizing their leanings were country. —AFP



Visitors look at the sculpture "Leda" by Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi during at the press preview of the retrospective held at the Centre Pompidou (also known as Beaubourg) in Paris. — AFP photos



A visitor looks at works by Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi.

Rare exhibition of revolutionary sculptor Brancusi in Paris



A visitor looks at works by Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi.



A visitor looks at the sculpture "Maiastra" by Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi.

A rare retrospective of artist Constantin Brancusi, who revolutionized sculpture in the early 20th century but whose works can be extremely tricky to transport, opens in Paris on Wednesday. Born in Romania in 1876, Brancusi arrived in Paris at age 28 and soon after joined the workshop of another historic sculptor, Auguste Rodin.

"Nothing grows in the shadow of large trees," Brancusi reportedly said after spending just three months with the creator of "The Kiss" and "The Thinker". Working directly with wood and marble, and without using moulds, Brancusi launched a radical new approach to sculpture that sought to purify human forms into abstract shapes.

"It is such a pity to have to spoil a beautiful material by hollowing out little holes for eyes, hair, ears," he said. More than 120 sculptures and hundreds of sketches, paintings and documents are exhibited at the Pompidou Centre until July 1 - the first retrospective on this scale in almost 30 years. That is because many of his key works — particularly the plaster towers balanced precariously on a small base — cannot be transported without enormous insurance costs. The last retrospective in 1995 was also at the Pompidou, which inherited Brancusi's nearby workshop and entire personal collection.

Visitors can explore how his work evolved through different versions of his



A visitor takes a picture of works by Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi.

best-known work, "The Sleeping Muse", or a celebrated bust of a child, or his birds and seals. Brancusi "crosses all the movements of the 20th century," said exhibition curator Ariane Coullondre.

"He can be considered one of the fathers of abstract art, without being abstract at all. He never wanted to be part of any movement," she added. Tirelessly reworking his sculptures in search of a pure style, Bran-

cusi gave hardly any interviews and refused to have an agent, selling directly to buyers who had to visit his workshop.

Then in 1945, he abruptly stopped work, considering he had nothing more to add. He made no more sculptures in his final 12 years, instead spending the time rearranging his workshop and selling remaining pieces — but having already transformed the world of sculpture. — AFP



Visitors look at the sculpture "La Muse endormie" by Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi.



A visitor walks past works by Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi.



Visitors look at works by Romanian artist Constantin Brancusi.

BTS agency strikes new distribution deal with UMG

HYBE, the South Korean agency behind K-pop sensation BTS, announced Wednesday an expanded 10-year deal with Universal Music Group, including exclusive distribution rights for its artists' music. "Universal Music Group will exclusively distribute physical albums and digital music released by labels under HYBE to the global market for the next 10 years," HYBE said in a Korean-language statement. The deal applies not only to "existing labels but also to new labels to be incorporated under HYBE" in future, it said.

"Universal Music Group is to also support promotion and marketing of HYBE artists' activities in North America," it added. The latest announcement follows HYBE and UMG's initial collaboration in 2017 on BTS, through a distribution agreement in Japan. Last year, UMG's Geffen Records and HYBE collaborated on "The Debut: Dream Academy," a YouTube audition series that highlighted their joint venture to form a girl group in the US using HYBE's K-pop training program.

The final winners of the audition show — a six-member group — are set to make their debut this year. The two companies will further collaborate on HYBE's superfan media platform Weverse, aiming to bring "more of a direct connection" between UMG artists and their fandom, a separate statement posted on UMG's website on Tuesday said. "HYBE has secured infinite growth potential through its partnership with Universal Music Group, the most iconic company in the music industry," Bang Si-Hyuk, Chairman of HYBE, said according to HYBE's Wednesday statement.

UMG's artists include Taylor Swift, Ariana Grande and Justin Bieber, among others. HYBE's BTS, on the other hand, has become a global cultural phenomenon, selling out stadiums around the world and dominating key US charts while raking in billions for South Korea's economy and building an international legion of fans known as ARMY.

All BTS members are currently enlisted in South Korea's mandatory military service. HYBE announced in September last year that all seven members of the group had renewed their contracts. The announcement implies that all seven members are likely to stay with the agency after completing their military service. HYBE shares were up 6.92 percent in afternoon trading in Seoul. — AFP



US sculptor Richard Serra, known for towering minimalism, dies at 85

Contemporary American artist Richard Serra, known for his massive yet minimalist steel sculptures, died Tuesday at age 85, US media reported. His strikingly large pieces are installed all over the world, from Paris museums to the Qatari desert, and have sometimes sparked controversy over their imposing nature. Serra died of pneumonia Tuesday at his home on Long Island, New York, his lawyer John Silberman told The New York Times.

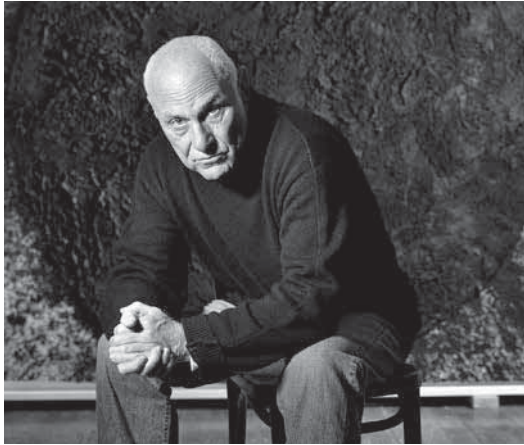
Born in San Francisco in 1939 to a Spanish father and a mother of Russian Jewish origin, Serra studied English literature at the University of California before going on to study visual arts at Yale. When asked in an early 2000s interview about what memory from his childhood might suggest who he would become, Serra said: "A little kid walking along the beach for a couple of miles, turning around, looking at his footprints and being amazed at what was on his right one direction, when he reversed himself was now on its left."

He says it "startled him and he never got over it." His signature giant scale was present in the off-kilter reddish-brown rectangles installed in Paris' Grand Palais for his 2008 "Monumenta" exhibit, and in the swirling and twirling steel plates enveloping visitors in their curves seen in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.

Serra, who credited influences from France, Spain and Japan on his artistic style and his evolution from painting to sculpting, moved to New York in the late 1960s, operating a furniture removal business to make ends meet. He even employed the composer Philip Glass as his assistant. That was also the period in which Serra composed a manifesto detailing the ways he could create a work of art: he listed

84 verbs, such as "roll" and "cut," and 24 elements, including "gravity" and "nature," which he could employ to forge a composition.

Serra did not begin to work predominantly in steel until the 1970s, in an echo of the summer steel mill jobs of his youth. He designed sculptures specifically for the spaces they were destined to occupy, and said he was interested in examining how his works interacted with their environments.



Contemporary American artist Richard Serra

"Certain things... stick in your imagination, and you have a need to come to terms with them," Serra told US interviewer Charlie Rose in the early 2000s. "And spatial differences: what's on your right, what's on your left, what it means to walk around a curve, looking at a convexity and then looking at a concavity — just asking fundamental questions about what you don't understand, those things have always interested me," he said. — AFP



These photographs show tulips at the Keukenhof gardens in Lisse, western Netherlands.



This photograph shows tulips and other flowers at the Keukenhof gardens.



Blooming good: World's biggest tulip garden marks 75th edition

The world's biggest tulip garden opened to the public on Thursday for its 75th edition, with hundreds of thousands of people expected to enjoy a bewildering array of seven mil-

lion bulbs in the western Dutch city of Lisse. Keukenhof park, southwest of Amsterdam in the heart of "bulb country", contains millions of tulips of every color as well as other flowers across

32 hectares (80 acres). The park is a popular tourist attraction -- 1.4 million visited last year--that claims to be one of the most photographed spots in the world. "This is my first time here and I'm so excit-

the way the air smells," added Cam Upton, a first time visitor from Colorado. Nisha Kasiliya-Ravindran, a 37-year-old from India, said she was "a bit disappointed" because many of the tulips have yet to flower completely. "We are hoping to go to the bulb fields outside as well to hopefully see some tulips," she told AFP.

Keukenhof dates back to 1949 when a group of bulb exporters and growers inaugurated it as a showcase for their wares. As well as tourists from more than 100 countries, it has proved a draw for royalty, with kings and queens from several European nations attending the gala opening down the years.

This year, one of the many highlights of the show include a golden yellow tulip, named after King Charles III, and a musical extravaganza to celebrate 75 years of Keukenhof featuring Dutch opera singer Laetitia Gerards. But the opening was also not without some controversy.

Outside the entrance gates, seven protesters of the climate group Extinction Rebellion briefly staged a protest against the use of pesticides in the



A visitor poses at the main gate of the Keukenhof gardens.

bulb-growing industry. "Those beautifully colored fields hide the enormous damage caused by bulb cultivation. Insects, birds and plants die en masse due to agricultural poisons," spokeswoman Lydia Steutel said in a statement. Most visitors however, said they were just enjoying

the outdoor flower garden. "We went around and were like playful kids, like 'oh look at this flower, oh the bridge' and just looking around," said Esther Brandt, 37, from Cologne. The park is open this year until May 12. —AFP



A visitor takes pictures of flowers at the Keukenhof gardens.



People visit the Keukenhof gardens in Lisse.



A couple takes pictures at the Keukenhof gardens.



People visit the Keukenhof gardens.



People visit the Keukenhof gardens.

Sports

‘Near perfect’ as Ravindra, Dube help Chennai thrash Gujarat in IPL

Gaikwad is learning leadership ropes under Dhoni’s mentorship

CHENNAI: New Zealand’s Rachin Ravindra hit an explosive 46 and took three catches to help holders Chennai Super Kings to their second straight IPL win with a 63-run thrashing of Gujarat Titans on Tuesday. The left-handed Ravindra, in his debut IPL season, made his runs off 20 balls while captain Ruturaj Gaikwad also hit 46 as Chennai posted 206-6 at their home M.A. Chidambaram Stadium.

Seam bowlers Mustafizur Rahman, Deepak Chahar and Tushar Deshpande took two wickets each to help restrict Gujarat, led by Shubman Gill, to 143-8 and go down to their biggest IPL loss by runs. “Today’s game was near to a perfect game, in the sense of batting-bowling-fielding, all three departments,” said Gaikwad.

“Against a team like Gujarat, we had to produce this kind of performance.” Chennai’s Shivam Dube top-scored with his 51 off 23 deliveries to boost the total after Ravindra and Gaikwad gave the team a quick start in their opening stand of 62. Old war-horse M.S. Dhoni shocked his fans ahead of the T20 tournament when he passed on the Chennai captaincy to Gaikwad after he had led the team to its fifth IPL title last year.

Gaikwad, who led the team to a win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the IPL opener last

week, survived an early reprieve on one and made use of the spill. Gaikwad is learning the leadership ropes under Dhoni’s mentorship as the 42-year-old former skipper, who took a diving catch as wicketkeeper to dismiss Vijay Shankar, kept guiding the new captain throughout the game.

The left-handed Ravindra remained defiant and clubbed three sixes and six fours. Gujarat’s Afghanistan spin wizard Rashid Khan denied Ravindra his fifty as the leg-spinner had the batsman stumped while Gaikwad fell caught behind off Australia’s Spencer Johnson.

Dube, who was named man of the match, reached his fifty in 22 balls before he fell in the 19th over to Rashid, who took two wickets but leaked 49 runs. Gujarat, who won a title in their debut IPL season in 2022 and ended runners-up in 2023, were never in the chase after they lost Gill lbw off Chahar.

Gill took charge of the team and won his opening match on Sunday after Hardik Pandya switched to Mumbai Indians for another captain’s role. “Lot of new learnings, new experiences and different things,” said Gill. “It’s exciting to captain a team like Gujarat Titans, we’ve made it to the finals in the last couple of years so very exciting.” The final of the lucrative T20 tournament will be played in Chennai on May 26. — AFP



CHENNAI: Gujarat Titans’ Wriddhiman Saha dodges the ball during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Chennai Super Kings and Gujarat Titans at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. — AFP

Waikato Chiefs boss feels for under pressure Crusaders

WELLINGTON: Waikato Chiefs coach Clayton McMillan says he has sympathy for the embattled Canterbury Crusaders ahead of Friday’s Super Rugby clash. The Chiefs are second in the table with four wins from five games heading to Christchurch for a repeat of last season’s final, which was won by the Crusaders.

The Crusaders have won seven straight Super Rugby titles but sit bottom of the table and are the only team to have lost all five games so far. McMillan knows how that feels—the Chiefs lost all eight games in the 2020 season, which was shortened because of the pandemic.

“Believe it or not we all kind of feel for them because we have been in that situation,” he told reporters on Wednesday. “There will be nobody that’s sleeping too much. They will be turning over every stone to figure out what they can do to turn up (and win) on Friday night.”

The Chiefs have already beaten the Crusaders this season with a 33-29 win at home in Hamilton last month. A lengthy injury list and the loss of key players to overseas clubs has hit the Crusaders hard. Head coach Rob Penney is winless since replacing Scott Robertson, who left last year to take charge of the All Blacks.

With regular captain Scott Barrett nursing a fractured finger and stand-in David Havili carrying a leg knock, scrum-half Mitchell Drummond skippers the Crusaders. The Chiefs are without All Blacks playmaker Damian McKenzie, who is



MELBOURNE: Crusaders halfback Noah Hotham (C) gets a kick away as Waratahs player Jed Holloway (R) attempts a charge down during the Super Rugby match between the NSW Waratahs and the Canterbury Crusaders in Melbourne. — AFP

resting a knee strain. In his absence, 22-year-old flyhalf Josh Jacomb will make his first start for the Chiefs in an experienced backline.

“He’s surrounded by people who will certainly make him feel a little bit more comfortable out there,” McMillan said of Jacomb. Despite the poor form of the Crusaders the Chiefs expect a tough night in Christchurch. “It’s a bit of a cauldron, never an easy place to go. We know what’s coming,” McMillan added.

Table leaders the Wellington Hurricanes are chasing a sixth straight win this season when they play

the Otago Highlanders away on Saturday. All Blacks prop Tyrel Lomax is set to make his 100th Super Rugby appearance for the Hurricanes.

Jordie Barrett is the only survivor from last Friday’s win over the Melbourne Rebels. He keeps his place in a new-look backline which includes All Blacks scrum-half Cam Roigard. Hurricanes coach Clark Laidlaw said it was “a selection headache” which players to leave out, “but long may it continue”. “We rested some of the boys last week who had played a lot of minutes, so the opportunity for them to come back in was there,” Laidlaw added. — AFP



HAVANA: Cuban Greco-Roman wrestler Mijain Lopez takes part in a training session in Havana, on March 14, 2024. — AFP

Lopez grapples with history in quest for fifth Olympic gold

HAVANA: In the history of the modern Olympic Games, dating all the way back to 1896, only one athlete, Dutch speedskater Ireen Wust, has managed to win five golds in five successive Games. Cuban wrestler Mijain Lopez, however, is looking to match her achievement when he lands in Paris in the summer for what will be his sixth Games, even though he has not competed for over two years.

“I’m going to do it,” the ever-confident Lopez told AFP. “The fatigue is there, the body aches are there, so the mind has to be strong, the motivation has to be even stronger,” he said, dripping with perspiration after an intense three-hour training session on the mats at the Cerro Pelado high-performance centre in Havana.

If the perspiration and the inspiration do the job in Paris, the 1.98m (6ft 5in) Greco-Roman wrestler will move ahead of such luminaries as the Americans Carl Lewis (long jump), Michael Phelps (swimming, 200m medley) and Al Oerter (discus). Denmark’s Paul Elvstrom (sailing) and Japan’s Kaori Icho (wrestling), all of whom won individual gold in four different editions of the Games.

When, just shy of his 39th birthday, the Cuban gi-

ant overcame the Georgian Iakobi Kajaia in the 130kg competition in the Covid-delayed Tokyo Games three years ago, it was widely expected to be his swansong. He has not competed since.

But the 41-year-old—he turns 42 on August 20, just after the Paris Games end—is determined to grapple again, not just with his opponents but with his own advancing years. The first battle he has had to fight was with himself, getting his weight stabilised below the required 130kg. He is still a few kilos above but the training sessions are paying off.

“Confidence” is his watchword, both in his abilities and in his coach, Raul Trujillo, who guided him to gold in Rio and Tokyo. Lopez reckons a fifth Olympic title “is an attainable goal”. “It’s just a question of listening to the coach and trusting all his training plans,” he says. “Not to injure myself ... and then I’ll go to Paris to fight.”

Lopez’s Olympic journey began in the 120kg class in Athens in 2004 when he had just turned 22. He topped his preliminary pool but went out to the eventual winner Khasan Baroyev in the quarter-final. The Athens defeat was the only one in 18 Olympic matches for Lopez, who has also been flag-bearer for the Cuban delegation at the last four opening ceremonies.

Four years later in Beijing he turned the tables on Baroyev—who was later stripped of his silver for doping—and repeated that success in London four years later. Lopez went on to take gold in the 130kg category in Rio in 2016, where his victory over Turkey’s Riza Kayaalp was celebrated with a joyous salsa shimmy on the mat, and again in Tokyo. — AFP

Ohtani scandal looms over baseball ahead of opening day

LOS ANGELES: Shohei Ohtani and the Los Angeles Dodgers take center stage on Thursday as Major League Baseball’s new season gets under way on US soil against the backdrop of a gambling scandal that has engulfed its brightest star.

When the Dodgers won the race to sign Japanese superstar Ohtani last December on a lavish \$700 million deal—the richest contract in the history of North American sport—the move was widely hailed as a blockbuster coup.

A two-time American League Most Valuable Player, Ohtani’s once-in-a-generation combination of elite pitching and hitting has seen him compared to the legendary Babe Ruth since his arrival in the major leagues in 2018.

The skyrocketing euphoria amongst Dodgers fans was given another jolt when the team acquired pitchers Tyler Glasnow and Ohtani’s highly rated Japan team-mate Yoshinobu Yamamoto, further proof that the franchise is determined to make a serious run at the World Series. But fast-forward three months and some of the breathless giddiness that greeted the Dodgers’ December shopping spree has dissipated as they prepare to host the St. Louis Cardinals in Thursday’s home opener.

The Dodgers launched their regular season with two games in Seoul against San Diego, splitting the series 1-1 last week. The results however were a footnote to the scandal that erupted around Ohtani after his longtime friend and interpreter Ippei Mizuhara was accused of swindling him out of millions of dollars to pay off gambling debts. Ohtani’s camp issued a statement saying the superstar had been the victim of a “massive theft” by Mizuhara, who was promptly fired by the Dodgers last week.

Unanswered questions

Yet details of the scandal remained murky, clouded by contradictory statements given by Mizuhara, who initially told ESPN that Ohtani himself had signed off on payments to an illegal bookmaker totalling \$4.5 million.

Twenty-four hours later, Mizuhara changed his story, insisting that Ohtani had no knowledge of his gambling debts and did not transfer the money from his account. Major League Baseball announced a formal investigation on Friday as pundits across US media wondered out loud whether Mizuhara had in fact been placing bets on Ohtani’s behalf—something that could lead to a career-ending ban if the bets involved Ohtani’s own team. In his first public comments on the controversy on Monday, Ohtani denied ever betting on sport, accusing Mizuhara of transferring money without his knowledge and describing himself as “beyond shocked” at the betrayal of trust.

“I never bet on baseball or any other sports and I never have asked somebody to do that on my behalf and I have never went through a bookmaker to bet on sports,” Ohtani said. “All of this has been a complete lie...Until a couple of days ago I didn’t know this was happening... Ippei has stolen money from my account and told lies.”

Ohtani’s 12-minute address did little to dispel the lingering questions surrounding the controversy, which were left hanging by the Dodgers’ refusal to allow reporters to ask questions of the superstar. How was Mizuhara able to access Ohtani’s bank account to transfer vast sums?

How did no-one in Ohtani’s entourage notice \$4.5 million go missing? Why would an illegal bookmaker extend millions of dollars of credit to an interpreter earning a salary reported at around \$300,000-\$500,000?

The Dodgers meanwhile have circled the wagons around their beleaguered superstar. “We’re all behind the guy,” Dodgers third baseman Max Muncy said of Ohtani after his address to reporters on Monday. “For me, where I come from, you’re innocent until proven guilty. The guy has told us face-to-face what he believes is the truth, and that’s what I’m going off of. I believe him 100%. I have his back on that.” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts praised Ohtani’s version of events as “very honest.” “I know that for me and the organization, we support him,” Roberts said on Monday. “I got a lot of questions answered, as far as what he knew and didn’t know. — AFP

Olympic flame to burn near Louvre during Paris Games

PARIS: The Olympic flame is set to burn in the Tuileries Garden in front of the Louvre museum for the duration of the Paris Games in July and August, a source involved in the discussions told AFP. The decision to place the Olympic cauldron in the tourist hotspot in the centre of the city was taken “several weeks ago”, the source said on condition of anonymity.

“The Tuileries emerged as the first choice because of the ease of access for the public,” the source said. There had been speculation that the flame might be placed on the Eiffel Tower, while organisers also contemplated putting it in the courtyard of the Louvre, the world’s biggest museum, the source said.

The Tuileries “is an area that can be easily secured. There will be security forces on duty round the clock to protect the flame and the general public will be able to see it thanks to the raised footpaths around the garden,” the source added.

The lighting of the cauldron is a key moment during the Olympics opening ceremony, signalling the formal start of the global sports extravaganza. It was unclear if the cauldron would be lit inside the Tuileries or whether it would be transferred there after the unprecedented opening ceremony on July 26, which is set to take place on boats along the nearby river Seine. The identity of the person given the honour of lighting it remains unknown, while details about the opening ceremony—which will take place outside of the athletics stadium for the first time—are a closely guarded secret. Organisers have vowed to make the first Olympics in Paris in 100 years “iconic”.

Asked about the cauldron, the Paris organising committee said in a statement to AFP that “we will not confirm or deny any of the reports that are circulating. There have already been a lot of rumours on its location.” Organisers want the cauldron to be “placed in the heart of Paris for its symbolism and so that it is visible for everyone,” the statement added.

The Paris Games are set to take place at locations around the capital, including at temporary stadiums by the Eiffel Tower and on the Place de la Concorde which abuts the Tuileries Garden. The park was designed in 1664 at the behest of the so-called “Sun King” Louis XIV and is closely associated with the defunct French royal family, as well as the anti-monarchist Revolution of 1789. — AFP

Sports

Bellingham slots last-gasp equalizer as England draw with Belgium

Injury-hit England among the favourites to win Euros in Germany

LONDON: Jude Bellingham scored at the death to salvage a 2-2 draw for England at Wembley on Tuesday after Youri Tielemans struck twice for Belgium in the final match before Gareth Southgate's Euro 2024 selection.

Injury-hit England — among the favourites to win the Euros in Germany — were bright in attack but Tielemans capitalized on defensive lapses. The Aston Villa midfielder scored an early opener after a bad error from England goalkeeper Jordan Pickford and headed home a second later in the first half after Ivan Toney had equalized from the penalty spot.

Belgium survived a succession of England attacks and seemed certain to hold out for the win in front of more than 80,000 fans before Real Madrid midfielder Bellingham struck deep into stoppage time.

The draw is a welcome boost for England after they lost 1-0 to Brazil at Wembley on Saturday — their first defeat since the 2022 World Cup quarter-final loss to France.

"Jude of course is the headline and that competitive spirit, that desire not to lose, desire to win in the end, was decisive in getting the late goal," said England boss Southgate. "But I thought the whole team showed that throughout the game and recovered from setbacks with a pretty inexperienced team."

Southgate has had to grapple with numerous absences during the March international window and his problems mounted when defender John Stones was forced off early in rain-swept London, replaced by Joe Gomez.

The manager, when asked who would be available for the Euros, which start in June, said he was "lost". "The great thing is definitely some players have emerged positively from the opportunities they've had and so we've perhaps got more depth in one re-

spect but the injuries are a concern," he added.

"We've got so many players missing at the moment and we've still got the real heat of the season to come... we're not going to know what we're left with until right at the end."

Tielemans pounces

Belgium, themselves without the injured Kevin De Bruyne, took the lead in the 11th minute in bizarre fashion. Pickford tried to play a cross-field pass when out of position but could only pick out Everton team-mate Amadou Onana, who released Tielemans and the midfielder coolly slotted into the bottom corner.

But the home side were level six minutes later when Manchester United starlet Kobbie Mainoo, making his first international start, combined with Bellingham before the Real Madrid defender fed Toney, who was tripped by Jan Vertonghen.

Toney, leading the attack in the absence of captain Harry Kane, took the resulting penalty himself, stroking the ball home nonchalantly to make it 1-1.

With the game opening up, Jeremy Doku forced Pickford into a smart save while England forward Jarrod Bowen had a headed goal ruled out for off-side. Bellingham stuffed his lines when he fired over from close range with only goalkeeper Matz Sels to beat. Instead it was the visitors — fourth in the FIFA world rankings, one place below their opponents — who regained the lead, to the delight of their vocal band of fans.

Lewis Dunk, playing in central defence in place of the missing Harry Maguire, failed to deal with a long ball over the top and Belgium captain Romelu Lukaku pounced. The forward crossed brilliantly with the outside of his left foot, straight into the path of the diving Tielemans, who headed home



LONDON: England's midfielder #07 Phil Foden (R) fights for the ball with Belgium's defender #15 Thomas Meunier (L) during the international friendly football match between England and Belgium at Wembley stadium, in London. — AFP

powerfully in the 36th minute. The game settled into a similar pattern after the break, with England enjoying the lion's share of possession but the visitors remained a threat on the break.

Bellingham missed a glorious chance to equalize when he put a header wide from close range but he made his final effort count in the 95th minute.

Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco said he was disappointed to miss out on a "special and fantastic" win but admitted England were strong.

"They created many, many chances," he said. "We had a feeling from the very beginning that they wanted to win the second game during this (international) camp and that's why I think the result is OK." — AFP

Germany find the right mix with Euro 2024 on the horizon

FRANKFURT: With two wins out of two against top-class opposition, Euro 2024 hosts Germany look to have found the right balance under coach Julian Nagelsmann with the tournament on the horizon. Having failed to make it past the last 16 of a major tournament since 2016, successive wins in the space of four days over France and the Netherlands have propelled Germany back into contention.

Nagelsmann reshuffled his squad ahead of the March friendlies, leaving out big names Leon Goretzka, Serge Gnabry, Emre Can and Mats Hummels. Instead, he selected a mix of young talents and unheralded debutants, alongside a few experienced heads. Days after a dominant 2-0 win over France in Lyon, Germany came from a goal down inside four minutes to beat the Dutch 2-1. Other than securing two wins in a row for the first time since 2021, Germany demonstrated the cohesion, impetus and desire which had been sorely lacking.

'A good mix'

Nagelsmann said as much after beating the Dutch, telling reporters the three-time European champions had "found a good mix" less than three months out from the first match against Scotland in Munich on June 14. "The spirit in the team is good. Everyone has their role, even those who did not play, when they returned they contributed," the 36-year-old manager said. Unlike recent Germany squads which leant heavily on players from Bayern Munich and Borussia



FRANKFURT: (L-R) Germany's midfielder #10 Jamal Musiala, Germany's defender #18 Maximilian Mittelstadt and Netherlands' forward #10 Memphis Depay vie for the ball during the friendly football match between Germany and Netherlands in Frankfurt. — AFP

Dortmund, Nagelsmann chose form over reputation in his 26-man squad.

Only two Bayern players made the starting XI on Tuesday, while just one from Dortmund was in the squad. Instead, Nagelsmann chose in-form players from Xabi Alonso's league leaders Bayer Leverkusen and surprise package Stuttgart, who sit in third place having narrowly avoided relegation last campaign.

Both games confirmed Nagelsmann made the right call, with strong performances coming across the squad's spectrum of age and experience. In addition to the masterful return of veteran midfielder Toni Kroos, Saturday's win over France was fuelled by Germany's youthful forward line of Florian Wirtz, Kai Havertz and Jamal Musiala — who have a collective age of just 65. — AFP



WROCLAW: Ukraine's players celebrate after the UEFA's EURO 2024 qualification final play off football match between Ukraine and Iceland, in Wroclaw, Poland. — AFP

icant emotions for the entire country. For the important victory and making it to EURO. For proving once again: whenever Ukrainians face difficulties but do not give up and continue to fight, Ukrainians certainly win," Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, wrote on X.

Having narrowly missed out to Italy in their qualifying group and being forced into the play-offs, Ukraine can now look forward to the European Championship which begins in Germany on June 14.

They will go into Group E alongside Belgium, Slovakia and Romania and will have ambitions of progressing to the last 16.

Poland go into a difficult Group D at the Euro along with France, the Netherlands and Austria after getting the better of Wales in a tense shoot-out at the end of their play-off final in Cardiff. The match ended 0-0 after 90 minutes and there were no goals either in extra time, which ended with Wales having Chris Mepham sent off for a second booking. — AFP

Kuwait lose to Qatar in World, AFC qualifiers

KUWAIT: Kuwait lost Tuesday to Qatar in Group A of the Preliminary Joint Qualification - Round 2 for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027. The first half of the game, held at Ali Sabah Al Salem Stadium in Kuwait, ended in a 0-0 draw, though the two teams created several chances but failed to turn them into goals.

In the second half, Qatar's all-time top scorer Almoez Ali scored the opener for the visitors in the 77th minute. Their joy, however, lasted merely two minutes before Kuwait's player Mohammad Daham scored the 1-1 tie.

Qatar's Ali refused to give up and a minute later scored the winner. With the win, Qatar continue their perfect run in the qualifiers, sealing their place in the next round and the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 with 12 points, while Kuwait will battle it out for second place with India and Afghanistan, their next two opponents respectively. — KUNA

Brazil draw six-goal thriller with Spain, Endrick, Yamal dazzle

MADRID: Brazil snatched a late leveller to share an entertaining and occasionally heated 3-3 friendly draw with Spain on Tuesday as youngsters Lamine Yamal and Endrick dazzled. Lucas Paqueta fired home a stoppage-time penalty to deny La Roja victory at the Santiago Bernabeu, after the hosts had taken a late lead. Spain captain Rodri scored two heavily debated penalties of his own in a pulsating battle under a closed roof in the Spanish capital. The Manchester City midfielder opened the scoring from the spot in the 12th minute after electric winger Yamal tumbled in the box and Dani Olmo extended Spain's lead with a fine individual goal.

A mistake by Spain goalkeeper Unai Simon allowed Rodrigo to pull one back before the break and teen sensation Endrick, on as a substitute, fired Brazil level five minutes into the second half. Rodri dispatched his second spot-kick late on after Dani Carvajal was clipped by Lucas Beraldo but Paqueta had the final say. The match, arranged to help combat racism after various incidents of abuse aimed at Real Madrid and Brazil winger Vinicius Junior in Spain, proved a pulsating battle between two of football's heavyweight nations.

Vinicius captained Brazil for the first time but was largely kept quiet, with his teenage compatriot and future Los Blancos team-mate Endrick continuing to enjoy the limelight, along with Barcelona youngster Yamal. "It's a shame it got away from us in the last second, it was a penalty we could have avoided," Rodri told Teledeporte.

Rodri was given the armband on this occasion by regular skipper Alvaro Morata, as a gesture for the recent death of the midfielder's grandfather. "I dedicated (the goals) to my grandfather, for everything that he taught me," added Rodri. — AFP

Clinics & Hospitals

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804

Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

Change of Name

I, Cheruvu Thomas (current name in passport) of Indian Passport No. V3747468, R/of H.No. 3/1445, Sionpuram, Kadapa town. A.P. India-516001, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as Siddavaram Thomas, S/O Raja Kumar (new name) previously called Cheruvu Thomas, S/o. Raja Kumar (old name).

(#5190) 27/03/2024

Poland beat Wales on five ‘cruel’ penalties to qualify for Euro 2024

Poland earns a place alongside France, Netherlands and Austria



CARDIFF: Poland's midfielder #20 Sebastian Szymanski heads towards goal during the UEFA EURO 2024 qualifier play-off final first leg football match between Wales and Poland at the Cardiff City Stadium, in Cardiff, on March 26, 2024. — AFP

CARDIFF: Wales boss Rob Page said missing out on Euro 2024 was “cruel” on his players after Poland edged a penalty shootout 5-4 to qualify in Cardiff on Tuesday. After the sides could not be separated in a tense 0-0 draw, Leeds winger Dan James was the only player to fail to score in the shootout.

Poland's five perfect spot-kicks earned them a place alongside France, the Netherlands and Austria in a tough Group D at Euro 2024 in Germany this summer. “We created a good, emotional game. This is a very important day for us,” said Poland coach Michal Probiez.

Wales' new generation, shorn of the talismanic presence of the retired Gareth Bale, came up short by the finest of margins in heartbreaking fashion for the home fans and their manager at the Cardiff City Stadium.

“It's a cruel game, that's what I've said to the players, one kick away from qualifying. It hurts,” said Page. “We'll be bigger and stronger for having gone through this horrible experience. This group is going somewhere. There is a lot more to come, there are good times ahead.”

Despite possessing the threat of Barcelona star Robert Lewandowski up front, Poland failed to register a single shot on target in the 120 minutes. However, the visitors found their range from the spot as

Lewandowski, Sebastian Szymanski, Przemyslaw Frankowski, Nicola Zalewski and Krzysztof Piatek confidently fired home.

James had to score to keep his country in it, but Wojciech Szczesny dived low to his right to send Poland to a fifth consecutive Euros. Only once before have they managed to get out of the group stages of the European Championship, reaching the quarter-finals in 2016.

Wales lack creative spark

Both sides were in free-scoring form in the playoff semi-finals on Thursday as Wales brushed aside Finland 4-1, while Poland trashed Estonia 5-1. However, it was a far tighter and more tense affair with qualification on the line.

Page shuffled his forward options as despite scoring against the Finns, David Brooks dropped to the bench to make way for Kieffer Moore. Moore's physical presence has been a vital weapon in Wales' arsenal since Page took charge four years ago and provided a bigger threat than Lewandowski at the other end.

At the end of a first half short on goalmouth action, the hosts thought they had taken the lead in stoppage time. Ben Davies headed in from Moore's knockdown but the Tottenham defender

had strayed centimetres offside.

Szczesny denied Moore the opener just two minutes into the second period with a spectacular save to prevent the on-loan Ipswich striker's header looping into the top corner. Poland's away form had already cost them automatic qualification after defeats on the road to Albania, the Czech Republic and Moldova.

Wales goalkeeper Danny Ward has not played a minute of club football for Leicester this season, yet he was not tested before the shootout. The home side finished the 90 minutes in the ascendancy but lacked the creative spark to make the breakthrough that was so often provided over the past decade by Bale or the injury-plagued Aaron Ramsey, who was an unused substitute.

The tables were turned in Wales' first ever period of extra-time in international football as Page's exhausted men clung on for penalties. Jakub Piotrowski came closest to winning the game for the Poles as his effort from the edge of the box flew inches past the far post.

Wales saw out the final few seconds with 10 men as Chris Mepham was shown a second yellow card. But their first experience of penalties was a sour one despite Davies, Moore, Harry Wilson and Neco Williams scoring their first four efforts. — AFP

Medvedev, Alcaraz and Sinner through in Miami Open

MIAMI: Defending Miami Open champion Daniil Medvedev and top seed Carlos Alcaraz marched into the quarter-finals of the tournament on Tuesday with convincing victories. Medvedev earned a 7-6 (7/5), 6-0 win over Germany's Dominik Koepfer while Alcaraz took care of Italian Lorenzo Musetti with a 6-3, 6-3 win in 85 minutes.

Second seed Jannik Sinner of Italy also moved into the last eight beating Christopher O'Connell of Australia 6-4, 6-3. Alcaraz, who is searching for the ‘Sunshine Double’ after winning in Indian Wells, was too much for 23rd seed Musetti although the Italian certainly contributed to a crowd-pleasing contest.

Stadium court erupted after a rally in the third game of the second set saw Musetti clip the ball between his legs, lobbing Alcaraz but the Spaniard returned it with a ‘tweener’ only to lose the point to a deft volley at the net.

But overall it was a comfortable match for Alcaraz whose all-round game looks in strong shape. “I don't know if this is the best game I've played but without a doubt it is the best feeling. I feel great on the court, I'm moving great, I am not injured and not thinking about my ankle anymore.....it's the best feeling since the summer,” he added. In the quarters, Alcaraz will face Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov, who beat Pole Hubert Hurkacz, triumphing in a third set tie-break for a 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) win.

Slow start

Medvedev made an unusually sloppy start on Stadium court, with a series of unforced errors, and found himself trailing 4-0 in the first set tie-break. But having overturned that deficit, Medvedev went on to win all the remaining games as he showed that, despite his concerns over the rapid deterioration of balls on the hard court surface, he is comfortable with the conditions.

The Russian suggested that Koepfer had struggled to recover from the blow of seeing his tie-break lead vanish. “I think sometimes it happens, when you lose the first set the way he lost it. He played very good, probably was closer to winning it because of the 4/0 in the tie-break and when you lose such a set, especially when the points were tough, it brings your energy down,” he said.

The world number four, Medvedev will face Chilean Nicolas Jarry who upset Norwegian seventh seed Ruud with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 win. Cheered on by a large contingent of Chilean supporters, Jarry had 39 winners to Ruud's 17 and was delighted at his progress into the last eight.

“I'm very happy with the way I played. I was very strong on court, not missing many easy balls. The conditions were so tough. The wind was extreme and Casper also, he's a grinder,” he said. Italy's Sinner trailed 3-1 in the first set against O'Connell, as the Australian cleverly mixed up his approach, asking a variety of questions of his Italian opponent.

He faced a potential double break at 0-30 but responded strongly to come back and take the set after 58 minutes. The second set was more straightforward for Sinner who broke O'Connell's first service game and then took care of business to wrap up the win.



INDIAN WELLS: (FILES) Russia's Daniil Medvedev returns the ball to Spain's Carlos Alcaraz during the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters men's final tennis match at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

“He started off really well, I made a couple of mistakes. When you are a break down especially in the beginning, it's always tough, also mentally,” said Sinner. Sinner will face Czech Tomas Machac who eased into the quarters with a 6-3, 6-3 win over another Italian, Matteo Arnaldi.

Hungary's Fabian Marozsan, ranked 57th in the world, continued his impressive run with another upset win, triumphing 6-4, 0-6, 6-1 over ninth seed Australian Alex de Minaur. Marozsan, who will break into the top 40 in Monday's rankings, is playing in just his fourth Masters 1000 event and will play in his second quarter-final at this level against German Alexander Zverev.

World number five Zverev crushed Karen Khachanov 6-1, 6-4 inside 69 minutes, losing just nine points on his serve all match and never facing a break point. — AFP

Davis leads Lakers comeback over Bucks in OT thriller

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Davis led a stunning late fightback as the Los Angeles Lakers overturned a 19-point fourth quarter deficit to defeat the Milwaukee Bucks 128-124 in double overtime on Tuesday. With LeBron James ruled out through injury, a banged-up Davis spent nearly 52 minutes on court to rally the Lakers to victory against an in-form Bucks side who went into the clash on a six-game winning streak.

Davis finished with 34 points, 23 rebounds and two assists while also making four blocks in a towering defensive display. The Lakers veteran was backed offensively by Austin Reaves and D'Angelo Russell, who both finished with 29 points apiece.

Reaves bagged only the second triple-double of his career, with 14 rebounds and 10 assists to go alongside his 29 points. Milwaukee meanwhile were left wondering where it all went wrong after leading the game from the start of the first quarter until the Lakers tied it up at 101-101 courtesy of two free throws from Taurean Prince with 44 seconds remaining.

Two see-saw periods of overtime saw the lead go back and forth until a 28-foot Reaves three-pointer and two free throws from Russell gave the Lakers a decisive 126-121 advantage with 14 seconds remaining. Malik Beasley's three-pointer closed the gap to two points for Milwaukee but two more Davis free throws sealed victory.

“That was a hell of a team win right there,” Lakers coach Darvin Ham said afterwards. It was a great way to start off a six-game road trip.

Reaves meanwhile saluted Davis' battling performance. The 31-year-old was clearly struggling for mobility for much of the game after injuring a knee in a collision with Milwaukee's Khris Middleton. “He just wanted to continue to battle with us,” Reaves said of Davis. “Any time he's on the court he's making an impact.”

Giannis Antetokounmpo led Milwaukee's scorers with 29 points while Damian Lillard finished with 27. Milwaukee coach Doc Rivers meanwhile said his team paid the price for not putting the game out of reach after twice opening up double-digit leads.

“When you have team down 18 points, you have a chance to take that lead to 30, and we didn't do that,” Rivers said. “Instead we let it go from 18 to 10; and that gave them hope. It will be a good lesson for us.”

The victory leaves the Lakers firmly on track for at least a place in the play-in tournament. The Lakers are ninth in the Western Conference with a 40-32 record. The Bucks remain second in the Eastern Conference despite falling to 46-26. — AFP